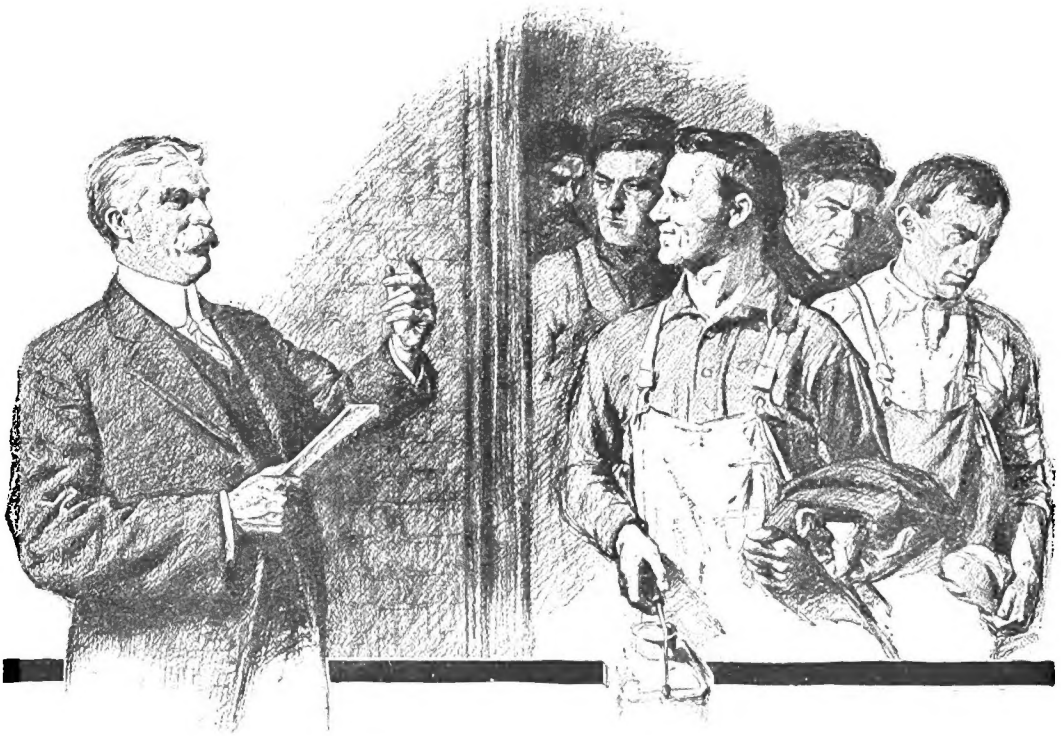

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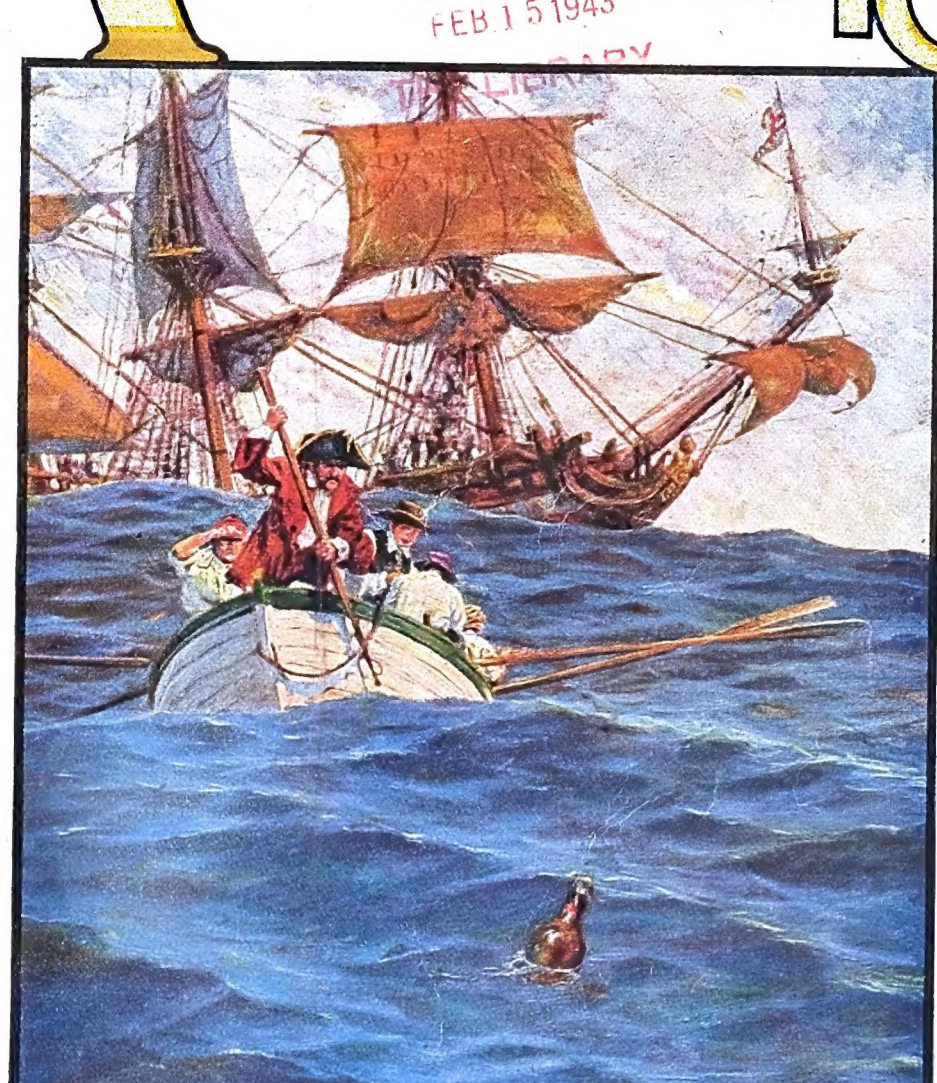

"THE AWAKENING of THELMA"—A Complete Nove

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VOL. 7 **ADVENTURE** NO. 1

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman Managing Editor

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with any old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name if possible. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relatives Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

WOULD like to know whereabouts of F. E. Smith, who was in U. S. Naval Academy in 1896-7, resigned and enlisted in U. S. Navy to take a hand in Spanish War. Served on Dewey's *Olympia* at Manila Bay, then served in putting down insurrection in Philippines, Boxer insurrection in China 1900. Last heard from was 2nd Lieut. of Marines. An old shipmate who fought with him in many a hot engagement would like to hear from or of him. —Address DANNY SHARPE, 537 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, Cal.

PETE MEISSNER from Grajervo or any one knowing his present address or a clue of his whereabouts kindly notify. Last time heard of in Chicago in 1903.—Address C. MEISSNER, Box 38, Lemon Grove, Cal.

WILL Chas. Bush, who was discharged from U. S. N. at Mare Island in 1911, please write Fred Sheckler, Quartermaster's Corps, Fort Sill, Okla.?

ANY one knowing the whereabouts of John W. (Red) Bardsley, whom I last saw in Benson, Arizona, working on the Benson *Press*, please communicate with B. D. W.—Address No. L. T. 152.

WILL Big Mentusha communicate with Leo Y. Downman, Janes Road P. O., Vancouver.?

WILL any one knowing the address of "Leç" Morris or P. M. Morris, kindly communicate with his mother, Mrs. M. A. Bettis, General Delivery, Seattle, Washington, or his sister, K. E. Rockwell, 125 West Main St., Medford, Oregon.? He was last heard of in Valparaiso, Chile. At that time was working as a locomotive engineer. About 5 ft. 6 in. in height; dark; now 41 years old.

WOULD like to hear from the following persons: James Barwick, who lived in St. Louis in the 80's, Thomas Barwick, who was in Linn Co., Kansas, in the 80's, and A. K. Barwick, who was in New York City in the 80's.—Address G. H. BARWICK, care of Mrs. Ida Cody, 234 Winston St., Los Angeles, Cal.

WHERE is Jay Quinn who lived in Manhattan a few years ago? Address Bess Clayton, 146 W. 31st St., New York City.?

ROLAND HENRY CRANE, late steamer-steward sailing from Liverpool seven years ago, and worked in New Orleans as a waiter, will please communicate with his wife at Walton Hall Farm Dairy, Cherry Lane, Walton, Liverpool. Any person knowing his whereabouts will confer a great favor upon the wife by notifying her. At the time of leaving Liverpool he was 27 years of age, brown curly hair, small gray eyes, tall, played piano and violin. Red mark on cheek and ridge on the back of middle finger on his left hand. Slight mustache. —Address Mrs. Crane, Walton Hall Farm Dairy, Cherry Lane, Walton, Liverpool, England.

NEWS wanted of William G. Tice, age 41, last heard from in Fort Worth, Texas, either in 1905 or 1906. Light complexion, blue eyes. Has a scar on one cheek which forms a dimple when he smiles. Short of stature, and was inclined to be a little stout when last seen. His poor mother is an invalid and worries so about her boy. "Scrap," if you see this, for mother's sake write to me at once. —Address MRS. MAMIE CARTER, North Augusta, S. C.

WILL J. Clayton Randall who was with Lorenz Bros. (hypnotists) during the season of 1911-12 (last heard of at Lake Placid), please communicate with Don I. Bailey, No. 525 Kenilworth Court, Clinton, Iowa?

ED. BUSHBY, "Cockney," would like (if it should meet his eye) to get in touch with Jack Costelloe (an Australian) whom he traveled with in Ecuador and Colombia, having last heard of him in Cartagena.—Address No. L. T. 113.

DO ANY of the Camp-Fire remember the scout and military detective who served at headquarters of 3rd U. S. Infantry at San Fernando, Pampanga, in 1900-1 and who was known in that province and Bulacan as "Lintic" O'Sea "El Rayo"? And who of them remembers the hanging of Rojas?—Address No. 95.

WOULD like to hear from, or know what has become of Ed. (Wessel) Deckard, at one time soldier in the Philippine Islands and last heard from about 4 years ago in London, England.—Address R. CURRIER ERICKSON, Redondo Beach, Calif.

(*Continued on page* 223.)

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THE AWAKENING OF THELMA

A Romance of the Northern Woods

By Frank Houghton

CHAPTER I

THELMA OBJECTS TO HER SUITORS

THE girl's name was Thelma Yonson. Her mother had been a Frenchwoman, her father was a Dane, though had you asked him what his nationality was he would have informed you that he was an American citizen. The casting-off of that old nationality of his had been without scruple or regret, just as a man might rid himself of a bad habit, or a pair of old shoes. It is possible that he viewed his former loyalty to Denmark in the light of a bad habit, especially when he looked back to the poverty of his boyhood, as compared with his freer, easier existence in "the greatest republic in the universe."

Thelma Yonson had big, dark eyes. Her teeth were even and white as snow and flashed brilliantly whenever she smiled, in contrast with the deep carmine of her lips. Her hair was abundant and in color a rich auburn. She wore it in two great plaits down her back, and the plaits were as thick as a man's wrist and so long that she could sit easily upon the ends of them.

The room in which the girl sat was a small one with a little table in it and a bed neatly made up with gray trade blankets. In one corner there stood a wash-stand with a metal basin upon it, and a looking-glass hanging above. A stove, too, stood in the room and a lamp in a bracket on the wall. All the furniture was made roughly in the extreme.

Over the head of the bed there hung a crucifix and upon the opposite wall a picture of the Virgin. The picture was so placed that it was among the first things the waking eyes of the girl rested upon in the mornings, and she viewed it always with a reverent awe and adoration.

Thelma sat by her window in a deep silence, embroidering a pair of moccasins with beads and the stained quills of a porcupine. Now and then she would pause in

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her work and gaze thoughtfully out of the window.

But it was not the wide view of Lake Kakisa, gleaming in its melting covering of last Winter's ice, which attracted her attention on that sunny June morning. On the contrary the thoughts that were teeming in Thelma's head were such as exercise the minds of many maids of over seventeen years, and Thelma had reached her nineteenth birthday just three short days before. While she looked out of the window and while she bent over her embroidery she was thinking of her lovers and of love generally, and of marriage.

No thoughts of the noisy outside world ever troubled Thelma. All her life she had lived in the wilderness. She had first seen the light in the back room of a rough little two-roomed shack in a mining-camp of Alaska. And the nearest approach to what is erroneously called civilization and progress she had ever known was that same drinking, gambling, swearing mining-camp, with its dance-halls, its rough and too often brutal men and painted, evil women. But she was too young to be smirched by her foul surroundings, and so passed scatheless through them.

At last they had left the mining-camp and Alaska, and her father had returned to the life that he had lived ere he had gone into mining; namely, that of a free trader, and so the girl's life had become even more lonely. Gradually, by varying stages, her mother and father had drifted into the wildest parts of northern Canada. Ultimately they had reached Lake Kakisa where it seemed that they were destined to remain, for here her father did well in his trader's business. Here, too, when Thelma had reached the age of twelve years, her mother had died, and the loss of that mother had wounded, near to breaking, her young heart. But that sorrowful time had passed seven long years before and now Thelma was herself again, and wonderfully beautiful.

Now there was no woman in all that Northland from Lake Athabasca in the far south to the Great Bear Lake in the North who was so splendid to look upon as that maid, and she knew it, and set store upon herself accordingly. Of white men there were four and of half-breeds two who wanted her, all six of them well to do in their way. But she only laughed at them. Nobody would do for her but a white man of importance, a rich free trader or a Company's man. He must be handsome, too, she told herself.

No man with but his canoe and rifle, his traps and blankets would suffice. Oh, dear me, no! And so her six tall lovers must go elsewhere to seek their mates. She would have none of them. Her position in the country, as daughter of a rich free trader, her good looks, demanded a far higher price than any one of those could pay. She had a very just appreciation of her proper value down to the smallest plug of trade tobacco.

True, there was a white man living on Lake Tathlina who was reputed very rich, who would gladly marry her. Achittimo himself had seen his house and described it as a very large and wonderful abode. It was, so Achittimo had told her, larger than her father's house. She had heard, too, from the same reliable source, that he actually drank tea or coffee at every one of his meals, while of tobacco he had always more than he could smoke. Of sleigh-dogs he had two teams, reckoned the best in all the Northland. But, alas! she could not love him, for he was short and squat and getting on in years.

Detracting still further from his appearance was a great scar from his left eye downward across his cheek, just missing his left nostril, and disfiguring his upper lip—an Indian's brand. The very thought of his brutal type of face affected her young imagination like a nightmare.

OFTEN, too, she talked with Wahaneetah about her lovers. Thelma always employed the Yellowknife dialect in her intercourse with every one about the post. Wahaneetah was a half-breed girl, sufficiently pleasant to look upon without being exactly pretty, and a year or two older than Thelma.

Wahaneetah had that real appreciation of the advantages of wealth so peculiar to many women. In short, she was gifted with a shrewd common sense. There is little in human character more ugly and nothing has contributed less of real greatness and beauty to this world than that same objectionable, though necessary, human trait.

When Thelma talked of her lovers with Wahaneetah the latter had always replied with much common sense to everything her friend had said. Being a sensible

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woman, and thus terribly handicapped, she had always advocated her marrying her rich admirer. She could neither understand nor appreciate Thelma's objection.

Once Thelma had said:

"But he was so very ugly, Wahaneetah."

To which Wahaneetah had replied with extraordinary wisdom:

"All men are ugly, Thelma, but a rich one is the best that the Great Spirit offers and surely we must take the best when it is given to us."

"But, Wahaneetah," Thelma had replied, in her queer way of employing the past tense; "I was not kissing so ugly a man."

"Pah!" said Wahaneetah.

"I would have the freedom of the stars," said Thelma sadly, which is a saying among the Yellowknives.

"In the daytime," mused Wahaneetah, "there is much fine trade to be bought with money at the store. There are beads, red, blue and white; there are handkerchiefs of silk, beautiful as the sunlight upon still water; and there are long stockings that reach above your knee. Thelma, I have seen stockings, scarlet stockings, for which I would kiss the ugliest man that ever drew breath. Then, too, at night one may sleep and forget."

"Achittimo was telling me," said Thelma, "that he did once stay overnight in his great house, and that he lay in a room apart from the rich man, but that he could not sleep at all for the sound of his snoring. Can one sleep and forget when the noise in the house is as the noise of a roaring bear?"

"Achittimo is a great fool," said Wahaneetah.

"Wahaneetah," said Thelma solemnly, "I was thinking that I would sooner walk all my days upon a long trail without either stockings or moccasins than spend my life with such a snoring man."

"All men snore," said Wahaneetah.

"He is ugly as a toad upon a flat stone," said Thelma.

"There is Walking Rabbit," said Wahaneetah thoughtfully.

Walking Rabbit was an Indian who desired Wahaneetah for his squaw, and whom she had made up her mind to accept.

"Walking Rabbit was a man with an evil temper who did beat his last squaw till she was glad to die and be at rest. You had better think twice before you go to live with such a man."

"I have thought many times," said Wahaneetah.

"Walking Rabbit was going on a long journey this Summer to Old Fort Confidence on the Great Bear Lake, was he not, Wahaneetah?"

Wahaneetah nodded, and taking out her pipe proceeded to fill it.

"When he returns you will go with him to his tepee, I was thinking, Wahaneetah?"

"It is better," said Wahaneetah sententiously, "to pick lice from a duck than to die a maid."

Thelma laughed. "I was not thinking so myself," she said.

"Gitche Moquaw, to whose tepee I was going, was eaten by wolves near Nahanni Butte on the Liard, last Winter when the January moon was full. It is an evil world and I am cursed," said Wahaneetah.

"So now you would take Walking Rabbit?" said Thelma.

"I would not die a maid."

"He is as ugly as a month of rain."

"It is not pleasant to wander through the world and to find it barren and your belly empty," said Wahaneetah.

"Neither is it pleasant when temper and a stick welcome you in the evenings," Thelma responded.

For a time they sat together in silence while Wahaneetah smoked. Then Thelma spoke again.

"What is love?" she inquired.

"Love!" said Wahaneetah, slowly taking her pipe from her mouth. "Have you seen a woman with her child, her little baby, how she will crush it to her, how she will pretend to eat it, how she will press it to her breast and bite its legs? That is love, Thelma.

"When you have a feeling for a man, that he is part of you; when you would lean upon him and love the touch and smell of him; when you would sit beside him in the summer nights and look at the stars; when the sound of his voice is sweeter in your ears than honey to your lips; when you could listen all day beside him to the sound of the water of a lake upon the shore; when the thought of bearing his children strengthens you and the pleasure of the thought fills your eyes with the tears of rejoicing; when the smell of the earth is always as is the smell of it after it has been washed by rain; when he is the earth, and the sky, and the sun, and the moon and the stars to you

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and you would die for him with a smile on your lips! That is the love of a maid for a man, Thelma, and the longing of a maid for a man."

"Perhaps that great day will come to me, too," said Thelma sadly, "for I have not known it yet."

"It comes not to all, Thelma, but only to those with a great heart; and the way of a great heart through the world is a trail of pain and labor."

"Who was telling you all that, Wahaneetah?"

"Surely, Thelma, it was my mother, who was a wise woman and whose life in the world was without pleasure, for the white man she did love gave her nothing, not even his love, and poverty in this world, she did tell me always, is torment!"

CHAPTER II

THELMA IS COY WITH THE WHITE STRANGER

ABOUT the middle of June, though the ice still remained on the lake, Beaver River became clear. But there was a strip of open water running along the shore on that side of the lake upon which Yonson's Post stood. The open water extended from the inlet of the river all along the lake-shore to its outlet so that a man in a canoe could paddle up the river and along the open water to the post without portaging.

It was a day or two after Thelma's conversation with Wahaneetah that the former sat by the window of her room embroidering moccasins. She worked very leisurely. Every now and then she would pause and look out across the lake. .

It was a warm morning brilliant with sunshine. Not the smallest breath of air stirred the fresh young leaves on a near clump of second-growth poplars. A low point running into the lake cut off the narrow strip of open water to the westward.

A flock of ducks suddenly came into view, swimming quickly round the point. Thelma sat watching them and wondering idly what was frightening them. A loon flying high overhead uttered its wild, lonely call, sure presage of a change.

The flock of ducks again attracted the girl's attention. They huddled closely together and lifted their heads high. Then they started in swift, heavy flight, beating the surface-mirror of still water with their quick, strong wings as they gradually rose above it. The bow of a canoe came into sight around the point. Then the canoe itself, with a man paddling in the stern, came into full view and, turning slightly, headed for the post. A few minutes later it grated gently on the sand and pebbles of the landing. Strangely, it was a small Peterborough canoe and in color a dirty green. Its occupant, a slight man, well over middle height, stepped to the shore.

"I was wondering," said Thelma, as she laid her work aside and rose to her feet, "who the white man was and what it was he wants." A moment later she entered the store.

She lounged over to the door, and standing in it watched the approach of the stranger. Achittimo and Walking Rabbit sat close by in the shadow of the post and played chuckie-stones for tobacco. An old sleigh-dog lying near lifted his head from his paws and growled at the approach of the white man. Achittimo picked a stick from the ground and speaking sharply threw it at the dog, who slowly rose to his feet and stalked stiffly and moodily away.

Thelma stepped out of the door and to one side as the stranger passed her and entered. As he did so he looked at her with a full, free, bold regard that took in every detail of her looks from head to foot. His glance was as displeasing as a sharp word. The girl colored and hung her head.

In the quick lowering of her regard she was conscious of a smile in the eyes and upon the lips of the man that puzzled while it angered her. She saw, too, that his face was clean-shaven and very dark, while his hair was fair. His eyes were brown and widely set and very deep in his head, his chin was pointed and his forehead broad and high. In short, his face was that of an educated man. In a way, too, it was a strong and handsome face with much evil in it, and more than a trace of temper in the eyes and upon the lips. His age might have been some thirty years.

At the store he bought tobacco, tea, sugar and dried apples. Then he took his pipe from his pocket, filled it, and lighted it. He smoked for a little while in silence, leaning on the counter.

Meanwhile Thelma had taken her place again in the doorway. She looked out across the lake with a longing always to look at the new man; but she would not,

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for she could feel his eyes ever upon her.

Wahaneetah, too, from her uncle's tepee, where she lived, had seen the stranger's approach and now walked slowly toward the store. A stranger, and particularly a white man, in that country marks a day.

A minute or two later Wahaneetah joined her friend. There is no creature in this world who borrows courage from companionship more readily than does a woman, just as at times there is no creature who will face despair alone more splendidly than will a woman; they are so filled with opposites and so divine! Thelma was no exception to the rest of her sex. She had never before felt more pleased at seeing Wahaneetah. She was more than herself again when she welcomed the half-breed girl, and her courage soared.

Wahaneetah's store of tobacco was getting low. Wahaneetah was gifted with at least as much perspicacity as the average Indian woman. Intuitively she knew that she was doubly welcome just then. Wahaneetah was a firm believer in the truth and efficacy of the old adage telling us to "strike while the iron is hot." She proceeded at once to put her belief to a practical test.

"I was wondering," she said reflectively, "what ever would become of a woman if she had no tobacco?"

"Have you already finished what I gave you?" inquired Thelma, who, but three days previously, had given her half a pound.

By way of a reply Wahaneetah exhibited her tobacco-bag wide open and upside down, remarking somewhat bitterly as she did so, "Even the little birds have less sorrow in their lives than has Wahaneetah." As she passed Walking Rabbit she glanced surreptitiously at him, but he only stared straight beyond her with a wooden impassiveness of expression. Her glance was unfortunately timed, as Achittimo had just thrown the winning stone which depleted Walking Rabbit's store of tobacco by one plug. At such a time there is but little room in a man's soul for the home and pleasure of love; rather must he take counsel with himself how he may shortly again get the better of his adversary.

"I am pleased to see you to-day, Wahaneetah, and so will gladly give you more tobacco," Thelma said to her, and taking her by the hand she drew her into the store, laughing as she did so. Thelma, being taller than her companion, bent toward the other as she talked. She put her hand to her mouth and whispered as though she were afraid the stranger might overhear her. She might have saved herself the trouble, however, for she spoke, as always, in the Yellowknife dialect, which he did not understand.

Thelma knew very well that bending over Wahaneetah as she was doing, with her hand in a half-curve about her smiling mouth, she made a picture that would attract a man. From the corners of her eyes she noted, too, how the stranger was still watching her.

SHE had learned, to some extent, the power of her beauty, and knew that no man she had ever met could look upon it with indifference. In her room her looking-glass told her, every time she looked in it, that she was more beautiful than sunlight in the morning, or the stars, or the moon upon a night in Summer. For God has made nothing yet that, in beauty, is equal to a lovely woman. So Thelma coquetted with Wahaneetah at the man. She told herself, too, that he was very pretty, and that she would like to run her hand through his thick, fair hair. What Wahaneetah had said to her about love, too, came into her mind.

She put her arm about the half-breed's waist, drew her to the counter and looked at things that she had seen a hundred times before, turned them over, whispered to her friend and laughed at nothing. Her father was behind the counter. She asked him for tobacco and he handed her two small plugs, which she promptly gave to Wahaneetah. The gift pleased the half-breed nearly as much as the giving, with the stranger looking on, pleased Thelma, for it's in every woman's heart to love the *rôle* of Lady Bountiful.

Thelma was now standing beside the stranger, between him and her friend. He was not watching her now, but smoking and looking out of the door. Thelma turned a little pile of gaudily colored cotton handkerchiefs over one by one, while she discussed and laughed at each.

Her father and the stranger talked together for a little time, and Thelma listened, but the stranger seemed interested only in fishing and shooting. Thelma found his voice unusually soft and pleasing. Her father told her that evening that he was an

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Englishman and came from across the ocean.

After the two men had talked together for a time, the Dane, telling his daughter that he would be back in a few minutes, left the store, and Thelma and her friend once more turned their attention to the handkerchiefs. At length they came to one over which Thelma, to her own satisfaction, affected much interest.

The stranger turned to her, took the corner between his finger and thumb, and remarked:

"It is pretty, certainly, but not nearly pretty enough for you."

Thelma let the handkerchief fall to the counter as though it burned her. She drew herself up, stiffening into stillness. She stared, unseeing, at the shelves of trade before her.

"No," he said again, "it is not nearly pretty enough for you." He stooped toward her so that his head, with its fair hair, was very near her own.

Thelma turned, quick as a bird, to Wahaneetah, after a flying glance at the dark, smiling face of the man; bent to her friend, and placing a brown hand beside her mouth, she laughed.

But Wahaneetah was not so shy. Certainly she giggled too, but recovered herself sooner. Wahaneetah was a woman with "an eye for the main chance," as the saying is. She picked a very brilliantly colored handkerchief from the pile. Looking full at the stranger and placing a slim brown finger on her breast, she said in her halting English,

"You give Wahaneetah?"

The man laughed. "Yes," he said, "take it."

The girls' eyes met again, and again Wahaneetah giggled.

But it was plainly evident that Thelma was his choice. Choosing the very brightest handkerchief he held it toward her, saying, "Won't you have this one?"

But Thelma only looked at him and then at her friend, and laughed, shaking her head. Then she pulled Wahaneetah by the arm and together they walked across the room to the door where they stood looking out at the wet, gleaming ice covering the lake.

Once again the Englishman tried to engage her in conversation:

"I am going to camp here. Where is there a good place?"

But Thelma only pulled Wahaneetah closer to her, while they both giggled softly together. Just then Yonson returned to the store and the two girls walked away, their arms about each other, into the sunshine.

CHAPTER III

THELMA FIGHTS OFF THE WHITE STRANGER

A WEEK later Thelma and Wahaneetah were sitting together in the former's little bedroom. About Wahaneetah's neck she wore the gaily colored handkerchief given to her by the Englishman. Thelma sat in a chair whittling a stick with a small sharp-pointed sheath-knife. Wahaneetah half sat, half lay upon the floor, with her shoulders against the wall, and smoked her pipe.

"I have spoken with him every day this week, and three times I have walked with him by the lake-shore. I was with him, too, in his canoe, when there were no clouds and the wind was quiet," said Thelma.

"And——?" queried Wahaneetah.

"I fear him; his mouth is——"

"Pah!" said Wahaneetah.

"His mouth, I tell you, Wahaneetah, is cruel. Always his eyes smile, but his mouth —— I tell you it is no good. I fear him. Always I keep this knife in my shirt."

"Yet he is a pretty man, and in his hair there is sunshine."

Thelma shook her head. "I was not seeing it now," she said.

"He speaks of love?"

"Always, and last night in the moonlight, at the landing, he caught me very quickly by the left wrist and would kiss me."

"That is like a man. And you?"

"I was not afraid then. I was angry. I say, 'Do not hold my wrist; I am not your squaw;' but he held me in a very strong way so that I could not get away from him, and always his eyes laugh, but his mouth was wicked like a dog's when you take the fish from him.

"Then he say to me: 'By Jove, Thelma!' he say. 'You are a beauty; I am crazy for you, Thelma.'

"Then he began to pull me, so I say to him, 'I can never love you; give me my wrist.'

"But he only laugh at that and say, 'I will kiss you, by Jove!'

"Then I take the knife very quickly from

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under my shirt, and I say, 'By Jove! I will kill you if you do.'

"Then he let me go quick enough, I was telling you, and he say, 'You little vixen!' But I do not know what it was, 'a little vixen,' and I was not caring, but he looked like a wolf with the temper."

"What is his name, Thelma, and what does he in this land?"

"His name?" Thelma replied slowly. She leaned back in her chair and yawned. "One day I ask him what his name was and he laugh. Then he look at me very hard and he say:

" 'Why do you want to know my name?' So I laugh, too, and I say:

" 'You keep your name, I don't want him.' Then he say, and he laugh like a cross dog:

" 'Don't you get mad, beauty. My name is Jack. Eh, what? Pretty good name, eh?' and he laugh again. But I say:

" 'I believe you lie, that's not your name. Then he laugh very hard and say:

" 'You're a funny little duck, s'elp me Bob, it is.' "

"Bob," said Wahaneetah, thoughtfully. "I don't know what that is, 'Bob.' "

"Bob? Bob is an evil spirit," said Thelma, who knew no more about it than did her friend.

"What does he want here, Jack?"

"Gold," said Thelma, and returned to her whittling.

Wahaneetah knew but little of gold, but she would not display her ignorance, so she only smoked.

"He knows where there is much gold. He say he will get it for me," said Thelma.

"Will you be his woman then, when he brings you the gold, Thelma?"

"You take me for a fool? I tell you, Wahaneetah, he is a bad man; bad, bad, bad!"

"I know," said Wahaneetah. "He takes from a woman all—love, everything. He kiss much and promise, and when the morning comes he is far away, across the divide." She laughed.

" 'Cash only or you get no fish,' " said Thelma, quoting a northern Indian proverb.

"There is Walking Rabbit," Wahaneetah began again after a short pause. "He told me that——"

"Walking Rabbit!" Thelma interrupted scornfully. "I tell you I would sooner live with a carcajou and raise side-hill *bungelaros*, than listen to the snores of Walking Rabbit through the long nights."

Wahaneetah smoked her pipe and stared stolidly past her companion, but did not reply.

"To-morrow," said Thelma, "Jack was going to get the gold for me."

"When does he come again, Jack?"

"He was coming about Christmas time, he says."

Thelma picked a little whetstone from the floor and began to sharpen her knife.

"Always you sharpen the knife, Thelma. I do not know why you sharpen the knife," said Wahaneetah.

"In the evening I walk with the Jack man, and early in the morning I say good-by to him." Thelma laughed.

"You are as pretty as a dream I once had, but you will die a maid," said Wahaneetah, looking at her curiously.

"Tell me the dream, Wahaneetah." Thelma tried the edge of the knife blade upon her thumb.

"I have long ago forgotten the dream," said Wahaneetah. After a bit she added:

It was a very pretty dream about a young man who was as beautiful as the morning, and of how I did often meet him among the bushes, but I have forgotten nearly all of it. It was all about love. I think it would have pleased you greatly." Wahaneetah settled herself comfortably upon the floor, with her shoulders against the wall.

"Tell me all that you remember about it, Wahaneetah. A story of love is always interesting."

"I have told you everything that I can remember, Thelma." Wahaneetah carefully relighted her pipe which had gone out while she talked.

Thelma looked at her companion and her brows met in a deep frown, for she was thinking. She moistened her scarlet lips with her tongue, but she did not speak.

CHAPTER IV

THE WHITE STRANGER MAKES HIS WILL

THE next morning Thelma had charge of the store, while her father was absent lifting a net he had set in the lake. Only two or three Indians called for a little trade and went away again. Then for a time the store was empty and Thelma re-

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arranged some of the shelves. Just as she put on the final touches Achittimo lounged in with all the dignity of the aristocratic loafer, remarked upon the fineness of the morning and his own evil fortune at chuckie-stones with Walking Rabbit, and borrowing some matches from Thelma sat down and smoked.

Another short interval passed and the Englishman, Jack, came in. He had many things to buy, but when he found Thelma in the store he thought no more of them. Walking up to the counter he at once began flirting with the trader's daughter. He spoke to her of the gold he was going to get, but Thelma only laughed at him.

"It is all for you," he said. Thelma smiled skeptically.

"I tell you it is," he reiterated.

"How much?" inquired the girl.

"Ten thousand, perhaps twenty thousand, dollars."

Thelma clapped her hands and laughed.

"I tell you I mean it. It is the richest thing I ever saw. What do you think of that?" He took from a pocket half a dozen dirty, greenish-yellow objects, that looked like small gravel, and held them out to her on the palm of his hand. She looked at them in no wise impressed.

"What are they?" she inquired somewhat scornfully.

"You don't know what they are? Great Scotland!"

She shook her head.

"You, the daughter of a miner!"

"They're not much to look at anyhow."

"They're not, eh? Upon my soul! I only wish I had a cartload of 'em. Here, Beauty, I'll make you a present of 'em. Just you show 'em to your father. See what he says. Why, you little ignoramus, they're gold!"

"Gold! Those dirty little pebbles? I don't believe it."

But he made her believe it in the end; his very earnestness carried conviction. She was now more willing to listen to his stories of those mythical thousands, though openly she derided them and him. She asked him, too, why he would give all to her for nothing.

"But they are not for nothing, I tell you."

"What for, then?" she had asked.

"For you, of course," he had replied. "I give you the gold, you give me yourself. You, I tell you—you! Is it a bargain?"

"How much?" she inquired. She was enjoying the joke now. She laughed. It struck her as very funny, this selling of herself. She was a little uncivilized, a little unused to the ways of a Christian people.

"Five thousand; eh, what?"

She shook her head.

"Ten thousand?"

She was very beautiful with her smiling lips, her wealth of coloring, her rounded breast, her tall figure. She was laughing, and her white teeth flashed in their deep carmine setting. She looked to the man just then as being cheap at any price. He would have sold his very soul at that moment to possess her, to hold her in his arms, to taste those lovely, laughing lips.

"Ten thousand?" he repeated, moving a step toward her.

She nodded her head. Ten thousand! It was extraordinary wealth, out-stepping the limit of her imagination. She could not conceive of such a sum at all. Besides it was all a joke, she told herself. She would not marry him for twice ten thousand.

"It is a bargain then?" he said.

And she had nodded, laughing, saying after him, "It is a bargain."

Meanwhile Achittimo sat on a bench by the door, listening and smoking. He had learned English at Athabasca Landing, in the vicinity of which he had hunted and trapped for several years; but the man and girl paid no attention to the Indian.

"You may never come back," said Thelma.

"I not come back, and you here?" At the moment the idea struck him as singularly unlikely.

"You may die," said she, for she was weighing hazards.

"You are right, you beauty, so I shall make my will." He got a sheet of paper from her, at once, and wrote the document, leaving her everything he died possessed of.

"Now I must sign," he said. "But who is there to witness my signature?" He looked about him and espied Achittimo.

"The very man!" said he, and beckoned to the Indian.

"But Jack, Achittimo can't write!" exclaimed the girl.

"He hasn't got to; he can make his mark," said Jack.

A minute later the document was duly signed and the Indian's mark affixed. With some natural curiosity Thelma looked at

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the paper and read the signature: "John Edward Thorndice."

"I thought you told me that your name was Jack," said she.

"Jack is my name, or short for part of it," he replied. He folded the paper as he spoke, and laid it on the counter near the girl, but she paid no heed to it.

Shortly afterward the Englishman went out. The draft from the opening door blew the paper off the counter. Achittimo watched it while he smoked. In a measure the importance of that mark of his oppressed his thoughts, for like so many of his color, he had a reverence for his own most trifling action. Thelma, however, never thought of it again.

Early on the following morning John Edward Thorndice went away in his canoe, and Thelma, from the landing, saw him go. He had begged a kiss from her at parting, and she had merely laughed at him. Then, as upon a previous occasion, he had caught her by the wrist, and she had put her other hand beneath her shirt, while in her eyes there sprang a sudden light, that was not fear. Then, as before, he had loosed his hold, and she had laughed again.

Thus they had said farewell.

AN HOUR or so after Thorndice had taken his departure Achittimo lounged over to the store. The folded paper was lying before him on the floor by the counter. The importance of it weighed upon him as a trust. He smoked with solemn gravity while he kept an anxious eye upon the paper, much as a hen might keep her glance upon a solitary but precious chicken.

That morning again Thelma had charge of the store, while her father was busy in a little room at the back. Once the Dane called his daughter to him. As she left the store the Indian rose to his feet and silently crossed the floor to the folded paper, which he picked up and placed upon the counter with other papers. When Thelma returned, a little later, Achittimo sat where she had left him, smoking. A few moments afterward the Dane called out:

"Thelma, write these things, I tell you, on a piece of paper: three light axes; two beaver-castors, in a jar; one big lantern; one dozen No. 2 traps; half a dozen crooked knives; one pair snowshoes. You got that, Thelma?"

"Yes father."

"Put it away where it will be safe."

"Yes father," and she put the will safely away, for it was upon the back of it that she had unwittingly made the list.

In the afternoon Thelma and Wahaneetah set a net for *toolabies*. Afterward they gossiped and drifted idly about the open water of the lake, the greater part of which was still covered with ice.

"It is a funny story, Thelma, I hear about you and that Jack man. Sometimes I think you a little bit crazy. No Indian girl will do a thing like that."

"What did you hear about me, Wahaneetah? Tell me quickly." Thelma held up her paddle and watched the water dropping from the blade.

"It is very strange. I never hear nothing so strange. It is a story about you and that Jack man, and how you did sell yourself to him for money, very much——"

"Wait a little minute, Wahaneetah." Thelma held up her hand. "You talk very quickly, as a marten runs chasing a rabbit. Now take your paddle, Wahaneetah. I was in a great hurry, for I have much to do. To-morrow I was going, with my father, to Fort Simpson, six days' journey downstream, to the north, at the mouth of the Liard."

"I did not know that," said Wahaneetah.

"Paddle, paddle!" cried Thelma.

CHAPTER V

THELMA FINDS HER HEART AND LOSES IT

THELMA and her father did not, however, make the trip to Fort Simpson so quickly as the former had anticipated. Instead of six it took them nine and a half days to reach the post. When they did eventually arrive, they pitched their tent in the near neighborhood of the Company's buildings, where they remained for nearly a fortnight.

Half a dozen tepees of the Yellowknife Indians and as many tents and shacks of "breeds" and ruffianly white trappers made a veritable city to that daughter of the wilds. Never had she known before a time of such large, human gaiety and movement.

The day after their arrival the Company's little steamer that plied upon the river had startled her with its harsh, discordant whistle. She saw it panting up the

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stream, like some blown leviathan, to its moorings at the landing-stage. For quite an hour, seated upon a boulder before her father's tent, she had watched it disgorging freight, her bosom shaken, her rich eyes agleam with that first taste of an outside, throbbing world.

That day, too, after their midday meal, she had visited the post with her father. In her wildest dreams of wealth she had never conceived of such magnificence. She had never seen such shelves of splendid trade. The woman in her kindled at the sight.

In the store, too, she had seen him! He had stood behind the counter selling goods, laughing and chatting with his customers, and smoking tobacco rolled in little oblong pieces of thin paper. Never before in all her life had that young maid seen such a man! Half-hidden by her father's bulk she had watched him. Once the man in charge, tall and gray-bearded, the autocrat of that broad wilderness, had entered from behind and had called him "Rupert." So at least she knew his name, or part of it.

Once, too, in passing he had raised his eyes, caught hers, and at the dazzling blue of his her own had fallen. Twice again in the next few minutes she had found him watching her, and twice her eyes had fluttered to the floor with pretty modesty. At a third meeting, only a moment later, her own had faced his timorously, while his, bolder perhaps, had dipped into the soundless depths of those darker pools.

The man's name was Rupert Nairn; his age, some twenty-five years. He stood a full six feet in moccasins—a tall, slight figure, narrow in the hip, broad of shoulder and with long lean arms. His face, too, was such as did one good to look upon, honest and brave and kind. His fair hair clustered in a bright abundance above a broad forehead. A slight mustache shaded his firm upper lip, while his determined jaw proclaimed the man in him. Upon a river boasting of excellent canoemen he ranked high, while in a country where men grew up with rifles in their hands it would have puzzled one to name a better shot.

That same evening Thelma and her father —Yacob Yonson as he styled himself in English—spent at the trader's house. Her father and the Hudson Bay Company's man were friendly, although the big Dane, a free trader, waged a petty rivalry with that great organization.

When Yonson told his daughter that they would spend that first evening at the trader's she had informed herself that she was "frightened 'most to death." "The great house," she called it. It was a log building, quite twice as large as theirs at Lake Kakisa.

Then being a woman, albeit a young one, she had spent quite an hour, distracted, in determining what to wear. Would it be her caribou-skin moccasins embroidered with stained porcupine-quills, or her moccasins of moose-hide trimmed with beads? She decided on the former, for they made her feet look smaller. Then she hung up her mirror —a glass six inches square—and studied the effect of her three necklaces. The one of blue beads pleased her greatly. That of white beads contrasted so finely with her lovely rounded throat and coloring that her lips pursed in an "Oh!" of genuine delight.

The third necklace was of green and white beads. The pendant was a crucifix of silver, the much-prized treasure of a handsome mother, now sleeping in a grave by Lake Kakisa. She clasped it silently about her neck, unclasped it silently, and looked on the holy symbol. Her eyes shone luminous. She made the sacred sign. Her lips moved in a little prayer. She laid the necklace by with reverent fingers and chose the one of white beads.

Next she had to choose between two handkerchiefs of silk to wear as a scarf. One was blue, the other green and yellow. She spread them on her knees and studied them and marveled on her father's wealth, which could afford such finery. The clamoring artist in her swayed her judgment. She would wear the green and yellow, which suited well the olive splendor in her face.

Next there was her little caribou-skin jacket, tanned to a snowy whiteness and embroidered cunningly with green and orange silk, a long fringe of which ran down each arm. She thanked her lucky stars that she had brought it and felt that she might perhaps be a credit to her father. Then, too, she told herself, "If he were there he might approve."

When they entered "the great house" that evening she had held her father's hand and pressed close to him, for she was nervous to the point of fear. With a swift, timid glance she swept the room to find "he" wasn't there. She told herself that

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she was glad and in the same cruel moment felt her heart grow sick.

Then she heard her father say, "This is my daughter, Mr. Murdock." She thought his voice sounded so far away. Then the great man had taken her shy hand in his and said. . . . She really did not know what he had said.

Then she was seated in a chair. It was a huge chair—ridiculously huge, she told herself. It made her feel so very small. She sat straight up in it, upon its edge. She dared not move.

A little later the trader's wife came in. Thelma crossed the room and spoke to her father. She heard her father's voice again out of that distance saying, "She is my little daughter, Thelma." And then the woman was beside her, speaking to her in a queer soft voice, with that little *bur-r-r* of Scotland in it which made it doubly queer. Hers was the first white woman's voice Thelma had heard in years, since her dear mother's death.

Mrs. Murdock had said, "Thelma. That is a pretty name, Thelma." The girl felt the woman's hand upon her shoulder and, at the touch she shivered like a wild thing. But it was not fear; it was ecstatic happiness. Her sex was calling her, as it had never called to her from Indian women, and all her leaping blood was answering that call. She felt the woman stooping, and—and——

Her very heart stood still! The wall before her, the window, the trees outside, the hills beyond the river, drenched in that northern sunlight, seemed to dance past her in a flying circle.

Stooping, the woman kissed her and said: "You bonnie Thelma," and stroked her hair. And so that gentle woman's hand touched her heart. Her heart! Thelma had never known before that hers was a lonely heart.

A little while before that wonderful evening was over the door opened again and another entered the room. With a mighty effort and a desperate bravery, for a brief moment, Thelma had raised her eyes, but dropped them instantly. The hot blood dyed her cheeks. She held her breath. For in that swift glance she saw what she had come to see, and dreaded seeing, and prayed that she might see—the tall figure of Rupert Nairn enter the room. And so she saw her God. For Thelma was a savage.

CHAPTER VI

THELMA PLAYS COQUETTE

A LITTLE way behind the tent in which Thelma and her father were camped there was a trail along which was hauled the winter supply of fire-wood for the post. Flowers grew plentifully beside the trail, and the next day Thelma took her way along it picking them. There were numerous little blue flowers, the local name of which was "maiden-eyes," as well as many deep red ones on slender stems, called "Indian blood."

In a little time she had a fair-sized bouquet gathered, when turning a sharp bend in the trail she stopped. Her heart beat stiflingly. For coming toward her was a tall man afoot. She stood erect, Flight on tiptoe—the shiest creature one might ever see. The man was walking slowly, looking down, like one in thought. For a single instant, perhaps, she did not recognize the tall figure. In that moment Rupert Nairn raised his head, to see before him the tall slight girl. He, too, halted.

Perhaps while one might have counted three they stared at one another, between them a bare fifty paces. Thelma, reared as she had been among Indian women, did as her shy sisters do. She turned and fled! Among Indian girls the man knew that such action was often but a challenge. He recognized her on the instant. With locked jaws and smiling lips, and eager, dancing eyes, he raced after her.

Until that day the big Dane's daughter had always thought with pride upon her running. No Indian girl about her father's post could compete with her when it came to a race. That day, however, her pride was destined to a fall. For thirty yards or so she raced at her top speed. Then she looked behind, caught her breath and fled with a more frantic, desperate hurry. In the swift glance she had gaged the hopelessness of her escape, for he had gained quite half the distance. She noted his eyes with the victorious light in them. She saw his smiling lips, and caught the gleam of his white teeth.

Another moment and the rhythmic beat of his flying moccasins was plainly audible. Yet another, and she felt his arm slip under her raised elbow and clasp her waist; she felt his breath against her ear and cheek

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and heard his deep laughter, resonant with triumph.

"We'll stop now, Pretty One," he said, and checked his pace and hers.

She struggled for a moment desperately, and, like a wild thing, panted in his arms. She'd never known before such gentle strength.

"Let me go!" she cried, "Oh, let me go. I hate you. Oh, I hate you, brute!"

He raised her chin and looked with laughing eyes into her lovely, tilted face. Then her eyes met his and a shy bravery shone in the colored depths.

"The 'brute' will let you go when you have paid him." Again he laughed.

"'Paid!' What do you mean? I pay? I have no money. The woods are free. This path is free. Let me go, I say, you hateful man!"

Her bouquet of flowers slipped from her hands and fell, an avalanche of color, about her feet. Her pretty eyes dropped with them. Again she panted, "Hateful, hateful man!" and burst into a storm of tears.

Nairn instantly released her, and for an instant stared in silence, speechless. The pretty child before him, shaken with the passion of her weeping, was vastly different from a giggling "breed" or Indian girl, who ran only to lure her pursuer.

"Thelma, dear, I did not mean to frighten you."

"Oh! Oh!" she wept.

He gathered up her pretty flowers most carefully. She would have none of them. He took a little brown fist, wet with tears, and opened it, pressing the flowers into her hand. Perhaps his action enhanced their value. She held them slackly, in a luxury of grief. A crying woman is not always pretty, but Thelma weeping was a woodland Venus. He once more sought to comfort her:

"Don't cry, Thelma, you pretty, pretty Thelma. I was a brute to frighten you."

He touched her shoulder with a nervous hand. She drew back a pace; a feminine intuition warned her it would not do to let him even touch her yet.

He was beside himself and could only stand before her saying, "I'm sorry, Thelma; forgive me, pretty Thelma." Nairn, too, had lived the greater part of his life in the wilds, and had not learned to know that a coquette, an actress and an angel live in every charming woman. Perhaps, too, he did not know that in a woman's weakness lies her strength. For he had never even known the questionable luxury of sisters.

Every day after that, or nearly every day, it was Thelma's fortune to see Rupert Nairn. If by a happy chance she walked along the trail picking flowers, by a strange coincidence the tall Scot also walked the trail, and always, too, they met.

One day they passed an afternoon upon the river fishing. His extraordinary thoughtfulness of her comfort quite charmed the girl. Never did she realize before that day that she was so precious. Did she but moisten her foot in the boat the man was horrified and asked a dozen times if it were drying. He even insisted upon covering it with his coat lest a thing so tender might be cold, while at the mere suggestion of her moccasin being stained he expressed a grief most poignant. She was not even allowed to bait her hook. She almost fell in love that day—not with Rupert Nairn, but with a helpless state of maidenhood.

He entertained her with thrilling stories of his travels. Once he had even been so far south as Edmonton. It seemed to her a veritable London from his description. He declared—she listened with rapt eyes and bated breath—that there were quite a hundred houses in the town. She dropped her fishing-rod and clasped her hands. And, he thought there were at least three persons in each house. He even informed her that some of the stores were larger than the post at Simpson.

But that was going too far, she knew. She could not reconcile an outside world with such magnificence. Yet when she expressed some doubt, he smiled and said that there were even greater stores than those at Edmonton, and even greater towns than Edmonton. She sighed and felt a little hurt that he should take advantage of her seeming ignorance to tell such tales.

Upon another day they had anchored the boat at the lower end of a small island to fish in a deep eddy. While at anchor he had sat upon the seat beside her. His nearness thrilled her unaccountably.

He tried to teach her how to roll a cigarette. He had to hold her hands to show her properly. He said it was most necessary for him to hold them in a first lesson, and she—why she—— How could a girl

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like Thelma, who had lived always in the wilds, doubt such a traveled man, one who had actually seen Edmonton, a city of a hundred houses?

In that first lesson Thelma spilled tobacco, and spoiled two papers. At such a shocking waste she almost wept, but Nairn only laughed. She held her hands out for another paper, when suddenly he caught her hands in his and stooping, kissed them, saying, "Bonnie Thelma!"

The touch of the man's lips upon her hands, his tender violence, his caress, stirred depths till then unsounded. She wrenched her hands from his and sat bolt upright. The tumult of her feeling shook her. Her face, incarnadined, throbbed with its leaping blood. Her eyes seemed brimming with a wistful, tender fear and there was something like a question in their depth.

"Don't, sir," she panted, "don't, oh, don't! It's naughty of you; very, very naughty. My hands are——" She hesitated, choked, hid her hands in her short coat and looked as though she'd weep.

"Thelma, dear!" exclaimed Nairn, again distracted. "What have I done? I only kissed your hands, child. They were made for kisses. They're much too small for work. Thelma!" She stared straight past him, never seeing him. Her lip quivered. He felt that she would be weeping in a moment.

"Thelma, dear Thelma, look at me, Thelma. Please don't look like that." He leaned toward her with extended hands. She only hugged hers the closer.

"Thelma!"

"Take me back," she said in a choked voice, adding, "I think you are so bold you'd frighten any girl."

"But Thelma, dear, I didn't do a thing. What is a kiss upon your hands?"

"I think you're naughty; very, very naughty." Her eyes met his a single fluttering instant. "Oh, take me home."

The man sat silently looking at her, and she repeated:

"Take me home."

"Oh, very good," he said. He placed the oars in the rowlocks and bent his stalwart back to them.

With all the other men Thelma had known she had ever been the moving spirit. None of those others had stirred her as had this one. She had felt from the beginning that there was a difference, but she could not classify it. With those others she it was who had led while they had followed. This one, however, did not come with such docility to a beckoning hand. It seemed that it was her turn now to wait and watch expectant.

With Nairn she was fast developing a dove's meekness; he it was who led and proposed. He, the male, this time was master. In little things, perhaps, he gave in to her, but in all the greater ones she looked to him to take the initiative. It is possible that she did not recognize her attitude at the time, for in those quiet places far from the little bustle of civilization, there was and had always been the large primitive simplicity.

On their slow return against the current, Thelma spoke:

"NEXT week, I was thinking, we will go back to Lake Kakisa, to our home." She looked past him with grave eyes.

"Will you be sorry, Thelma?"

She held a hand over the side of the boat, her finger-tips breaking a ripple on the water, and looked beyond him silently.

Again he asked her if she would be sorry.

"I was thinking of your words," she answered him.

The man tugged doggedly at his oars, urging the heavy boat on its slow way. The girl still remained silent. Then the man questioned her again.

"Will you, Thelma?"

"I was thinking," said Thelma, for her father had brought her up with a stern regard for truth, "that this Summer is not nearly so warm as last Summer, but the one before it was awfully hot. Father says it was the hottest one that he ever saw. Why there wasn't a speck of ice on the lake by the end of June. There were lots of geese, too, that year. And flowers! Oh, my! I picked maiden-eyes behind the house in the beginning of——"

"Are you sorry you are going away?" insisted Nairn.

"Wasn't that a huge fish-hawk?" said Thelma, pointing overhead.

"Can't you answer my question?" A little sternness crept into the man's eyes. "Are you sorry you are going home?"

"Perhaps I was not telling you," said Thelma solemnly as she lifted her fingers from the water and dried them on her skirt.

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For a little distance Nairn rowed in silence and would not look at her. Thelma knew it, though she never looked in his direction for an instant. At length he spoke again to her.

"The trail in Summer is very pretty," he remarked.

"Yes," said Thelma.

"It's a grand place for flowers."

"Yes," said Thelma.

"Indian blood is prettier than maiden-eyes, I think," said Nairn.

"No," said Thelma.

Nairn looked at her. The current of the river was swifter just there. For perhaps a quarter of an hour he labored at the oars without speaking.

"There were three geese flying up the river," said Thelma.

The man continued his rowing without paying attention to her remark. Again Thelma spoke:

"It will be nice to get home again," she said in a manner of reflection, adding:

"Edward will be so glad to see me back. Poor Edward, I am afraid he was very lonesome."

The man glanced quickly at the girl. A very charming smile had touched her lips; a look of tender memories was in her eyes. In a measure her expression at the moment stirred him, not pleasantly.

"It is nice to know that he will be pleased to see you again."

"And the thought was mine, too," said she.

"I guessed as much," said Nairn, and Thelma smiled.

When they at length reached the landing she would not see her escort's hand extended to help her to the shore, but leaped nimbly out. However, she graciously permitted him to walk with her to the tent and carry the fish which they had caught. Just as they arrived, Thelma's father, who stood at the tent door watching an old Indian laboring past beneath the weight of a log, remarked:

"That old fellow reminds me of Edward, Thelma."

"Yes," she replied feebly, and flashed a glance as quick as light at Nairn.

Her escort smiled.

"Your daughter told me of Edward while we fished," said Nairn. He looked at the girl, but she was looking past him, far away. At that moment her father went into the tent.

"Will you pick flowers along the trail tomorrow, in the morning, Thelma?" He looked at her and his eyes pleaded.

"I was thinking that it would be very pleasant," Thelma replied.

CHAPTER VII

THELMA RESOLVES TO WAIT

THE next day, their morning meal finished, her father took his way to the post, where he had business. Thelma seated herself on a log in front of the tent and washed the dishes and the two knives they had used at their breakfast. A little pail containing beans hung over the fire and boiled slowly. When Thelma had finished washing the dishes she took the lid off the pail and looked into it. The water was getting low, she judged, and she added more. Next she went into the tent, but returned a moment later to her seat upon the log. She had work now in her hand such as northern women find to do.

Until the morning was well advanced she worked at the embroidering of a little bag of caribou-skin with stained porcupine-quills. Every now and then she would glance at the sun. When she was informed by it that it was quite half-past nine, she folded up her work, which she had finished, and placed it inside the flannel shirt she wore.

Entering the tent again she took from her dunnage-bag her green and yellow handkerchief and tied it about her neck. Next she put on a new pair of caribou-skin moccasins wonderfully embroidered with beads. She then extinguished the fire very carefully with some water and fastened up the tent-door. Her next move was in the direction of the trail along which she intended picking flowers. As it was distant but a very little way, a few minutes later the tall figure of the girl was walking leisurely along it.

Thelma, in her pretty moccasins, moved with the noiselessness of a shadow along the sandy trail. Rounding a sharp bend she came upon a hen ptarmigan with five small chicks. The anxious mother fluttered away before her as if sorely wounded. Her brood disappeared as it were by magic. When instinct informed the mother that her young were safe she rose on whirring wing and vanished quickly through the timber in a zigzag flight.

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But a short distance farther on Thelma met a lazy, loafing porcupine who arched his bristles at the sight of her, stared for an instant, and sulkily yielded right of way. She watched him as he nosed his loitering steps through underbrush. Still farther on she came upon a small patch of those blue flowers called maiden-eyes. She hesitated a moment, half inclined to pick some, but changed her mind and hurried on. And all the while, overhead, the interlacing branches made a latticework of shadow on her path.

She came at length to where the trail wound sharply to the left. She turned the bend, and stopped. Advancing leisurely to meet her there came a fair young man. The blood sprang to her cheeks. Her eyes were stars. She had looked to meet him at every bend along the trail and yet the meeting, when it came, was a surprise. At least the tumultuous spring of all her faculties told her that it was a surprise, although one most strangely, sweetly thrilling.

The dancing flow of her hot blood was moving as a lover's story. For was he not, when everything is said, the first man she had ever welcomed into her shy life? The noiselessness of her approach had carried her almost to him ere he perceived her presence. Nairn was advancing slowly. Meanwhile she stood and watched him with sweet eyes and all her pretty slimness very straight.

She might have been a spirit of the forest caught in the morning's sunshine. Timidity as well as love shone in her eyes. She yearned for him, yet looked as fearful as a wild bird, a creature that the snapping of a twig might scare to death. And while she looked at him her hands lay with a pretty pathos on her breast, and she whispered to herself words about that heart of hers.

Just then Nairn raised his eyes, his psychic sense perhaps informing him, and saw the object of his thoughts, with fluttering looks, before him.

"What!" he exclaimed, and his blue eyes shone with pleasure. "Is it the pretty Thelma?" He held his two hands out to her, but she would yield him only one of hers.

"I am thinking," she said in her shy, grave way, "that the day was very fine."

She dropped her eyes when she had spoken and—why, she did not know—she felt the hot blood in her cheeks again. It all made her angry and—alas! the aggravation of it—her anger made her blush the more.

"I have been twice up and down the trail. I thought you were not coming," said Nairn.

"I could not come before. I was wanting to finish this for you."

As she spoke she drew the embroidered caribou-skin bag from the bosom of her shirt and handed it to him. It was the usual tobacco-bag, though somewhat more elaborate, which Indian girls in the northern woods are so fond of making for their sweethearts.

"I was thinking that it might remind you of Thelma when she was far away on Lake Kakisa," she said in a shy voice.

Nairn thanked her warmly, telling her that it was just what he wanted, but at the same time assuring her that even had she given him nothing he never could forget her. He spoke earnestly, for he had never, in all that wide, north country, seen any one so beautiful as Thelma. Neither had he ever seen any one to compare with her in the far south, not even at Edmonton, where women were more plentiful than fleas upon a dog.

But Thelma had smiled skeptically at what he had said, for she told herself that she knew better. Was it not according to nature for women to know more than men about love? Had not she and her friend Wahaneetah many times discussed men and their ways, and sweethearts, and marriage and love, and the bearing of children?

And often, too, in Wahaneetah's tepee, while her friend smoked, they had spoken of the constancy of man. But always when that subject was touched upon, Wahaneetah had shaken her head and moaned a little. So when Nairn had assured Thelma that without even the embroidered bag he could never forget her, she had doubted him. Now all these things recurred to Thelma's mind as she walked back with Nairn along the trail.

For the greater part of the way through the woods the path was wide so that Thelma could keep up with her companion, though a little distance from him. But every here and there it narrowed owing to the presence of logs and the denseness of the underbrush, and in such places she had perforce to walk close by his side. This affected her with a strange shyness. He seemed so big to her at such times; his movements were so strong and free.

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Once when a great log lay across the trail he had helped her over it, taking her by the arm. At his touch she was aware of a delightful thrill which made all of her warm, live, young body tingle rapturously, for it was the first time that the hand of a lover had ever rested upon her. At the moment, too, when they reached the ground upon the other side of the log, the man suddenly drew her nearer, saying, "Pretty Thelma!" She had let him hold her arm and had even drawn a little closer to him, leaning upon his strength.

Thus they had walked along together until they reached the little patch of maiden-eyes. Beside the flowers upon a log Nairn seated himself and rolled a cigarette, while Thelma picked a bouquet. While Nairn smoked he talked to her. He told her of his work and of his ultimate aim in life.

By birth Rupert Nairn was a Scotchman, born in the Highlands. When but a baby he had accompanied his father to Canada. Since then he had spent almost his entire life in the northern wilderness. Finally he had got employment at Fort Simpson with a salary of fifty dollars a month and his board and lodging.

But the work at the Hudson Bay Post was only temporary, lasting till Mr. Murdock's son returned from the south where he was then being educated. At the time Thelma and her father arrived at the post, Nairn had been just one year with the Company. In that period he had acquired some proficiency in the Yellowknife dialect and had saved nearly four hundred dollars. He estimated that he could start as a free trader on a thousand.

All of this Nairn told Thelma as he sat upon the log and smoked, while she picked maiden-eyes.

"If only you were in the Company, Rupert——" she said.

"I only wish I were," he replied.

Thelma, her hands filled with maiden-eyes, ceased picking. Straightening to her height, she turned and looked at him. For a little while neither spoke, but the silence between them, that silence of a million tiny voices, that silence of the eyes so filled with questions of the soul, was theirs. For the second time that morning Thelma's cheeks were roses.

A tiny bluebird settled on a branch above her head, whispered a little twittering cry and flew away. Rupert Nairn sat watching her. His eyes were quiet and Thelma, looking at them, told herself that they were as blue as heaven.

The man rose slowly to his feet. His half-smoked cigarette fell to the ground. Thelma watched him. Rupert Nairn walked up to her and held out his hands. Thus far only his eyes had told the girl that she was very dear to him.

Thelma looked into his face and then her gaze fell to his outstretched hands. Her own hands sought his, while all her pretty flowers dropped to the ground between them and lay, a scattered heap of color like the sky.

"Thelma," he said, "will you wait for me till I make a home?"

"Rupert," she replied, and love shone on him from her charming eyes, "I was thinking I would wait for you till I die!"

CHAPTER VIII

WAHANEETAH LACKS A RETORT

A WEDNESDAY morning five days after that memorable walk on the trail was fixed as the time for the departure of Thelma and her father. On that last morning Thelma had been up and dressed by four o'clock. The sun, of course, was never out of sight in that short northern Summer, excepting for perhaps two hours, when it was hidden by some hills.

Rupert Nairn had waited for Thelma in the shelter of the trees, but a little way behind her tent. They had determined to have one more walk together along the trail ere saying good-by. Her lover leaned against a poplar with folded arms and watched her coming toward him. He thought her more beautiful that morning than she had ever been before. And he had the manliness to thank his God while marveling at his fortune in having won the love of such a woman.

Her eyes had a look of sleep in them—a lazy, languorous air of dreams that was enthralling. In them, too, there was a delicious note of smiles, and love, and gravity, and tender yearning. At times there is a look that whispers of motherhood in maiden's eyes—of motherhood, and holy purity that is but a reflection of the true soul of women. With Thelma then her passion was her prayer, her love its utterance, and Rupert Nairn her God!

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She walked up to him with that sweet bravery of a maid who is led by love alone and has never known a thought to doubt it. She went as naturally to his arms as to her home, for were they not her home? She crushed him to her with a tender violence. She could not have enough of him. The hunger of her lips it seemed that he never could appease. They laughed in murmuring whispers; their passion then was heaven to them, their only pain the thought that it was not eternal.

After their walk Nairn returned with Thelma to the tent to breakfast with her and her father. At six o'clock the boat whistled discordantly to inform any passengers there might be that it would leave in half an hour.

Thelma had never been before upon a steamer, and very naturally machinery in any form whatever was very awful to her. Like the Indians she called it a big "fire-canoe," and could not comprehend its motive power at all. She stepped from the little wharf to the steamer's deck between her father and her lover. She looked, and was as timid as a fawn, and like such wild things on a tense *qui vive* of nervous expectation of a scare.

The quivering of the deck to the engine's throbbing was but a certain presage of disaster. She looked to see it rent asunder any moment. A second raucous, screaming note of the whistle, so near that it was truly horrible, caused her to clap her hands to her ears and utter a startled "Oh," that was almost a scream. Nairn and her father laughed. She marveled on the cruelty of a lover and looked at him with grave, upbraiding eyes.

The engines started. The boat was propelled by a great stern-wheel which immediately began revolving and Thelma was at once thrown into a panic of fear lest her lover should come to grief while disembarking.

"Go, Rupert! Rupert dear, do go!" she implored him as she pulled him to the vessel's side. It was still a bare two feet from the wharf struggling with throbbing effort to gain a little headway in the current. "Good-by, dear Rupert! Oh, good-by, dear." She pulled him round to her and held a stricken face to him. Then, before an astounded father, her lover stooped and kissed her, and sprang ashore.

All that morning the big Dane said nothing to his daughter about her farewell to Nairn. In this way he was a kind, just man who loved his daughter and hoped for her happiness. As fortunes are counted in that country she would be rich, for he had done well in his trading.

That good-by had told him very plainly that Thelma and Nairn were lovers, but left him to conjecture how far that love had carried them. The young man, he was fain to admit, was very good to look at, a fine upstanding fellow and highly spoken of by his employer—just such a one as might please the eye and win the heart of any maid.

But how far had that love led them? he asked himself many times that morning, and for half a dozen hours or so he knew a keen anxiety. If Nairn had wronged his girl he swore by Heaven he would kill the Scot.

In the afternoon he stood with his daughter in the bow of the little steamer and spoke very gently to her of Rupert Nairn. She listened to him in a quiet way. When he had finished what he had to say she stole a shy glance at him. Then for a moment she was silent.

Suddenly the big Dane felt her little hand grip his. Something in the feel of it told him that all was well, and he thanked his God. She told him everything. The pathos that is ever in the picture did not touch her then.

On the evening of the fifth day after leaving Fort Simpson they were landed with their canoe and "outfit" at the mouth of Beaver River. Two days and a half later by canoe they reached their home.

Half a dozen Indians and half-breeds and as many dogs collected at the landing to welcome their arrival. A little apart from the group Thelma espied her friend, Wahaneetah.

After shaking hands the half-breed girl begged Thelma to come down to the tepee an hour before supper for she had much to tell her, adding that if the other brought a small plug of tobacco her heart would sing.

While they talked together Thelma noticed that Wahaneetah wore a subdued air unusual to her. Suddenly a thought came into her mind. She said, "A little bird tells me, Wahaneetah, that when I bring the tobacco, an hour before my supper, I must look for you in the tepee of Walking Rabbit."

Wahaneetah sighed deeply. "It is even

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as you say, Thelma," she agreed. She smiled somewhat drearily and continued:

"The noise of his snoring is very great, so that I have not closed my eyes for many nights. He is even now smoking in the tepee while he meditates. I must hurry and get more wood for his fire so that he may smile upon me."

She turned to go away, but Thelma caught her by the dress, saying, "I was thinking, Wahaneetah, my friend, that it is perhaps better to die a maid than to listen always to a snoring man."

Wahaneetah had no word to say.

CHAPTER IX

YACOB YONSON IS ANGERED AND PACIFIED

AFTER her visit to Fort Simpson and meeting with Rupert Nairn, Thelma did not find life so satisfying as formerly. Not being able to correspond with her lover she could only hope and pray while her heart was eaten out with longing. In those days, too, a gravity that was lovelier far than smiles chastened her eyes.

She fell, too, into little ways of silence which often caused Wahaneetah to wonder. But she never mentioned her lover to the half-breed girl. The others she had discussed freely with her, but Nairn she could not. Perhaps Nature, the only mother she knew then, warned her that her love was sacred.

Wahaneetah, too, respected a silence she could feel, but could not comprehend, and said nothing. At first she had thought that Thelma missed the "Jack man," as they had got into the way of calling the ne'er-do-weel Englishman who had come into the country to prospect and to whom Thelma, in fun, had sold herself. One day in some curiosity Wahaneetah, watching closely, had mentioned him, but Thelma had only laughed. Apparently she had forgotten his very existence until that moment.

At that time, too, Thelma did not see so much of the half-breed as formerly. The latter now had work to do, and Walking Rabbit was an individual most careful to see that that work was done, especially when it consisted in procuring fire-wood for his comfort. Whenever Wahaneetah could manage it, though, she visited Thelma in her room as she had done before.

Now, too, she had much to tell her about —many woes and grievances. Sometimes she would complain bitterly of Walking Rabbit's treatment of her, informing Thelma that he beat her too often, using, in her opinion, an unnecessarily long and thick stick for the purpose. But Thelma had only laughed at her, for she was used to the knowledge that men sometimes had to beat their wives when they were disobedient or otherwise naughty. Besides, had not Wahaneetah gone to Walking Rabbit with her eyes open?

But Thelma was not so unsympathetic as those unacquainted with her might suppose. She really felt sorry for Wahaneetah. Indeed, she even went so far as to tell Wahaneetah that she considered Walking Rabbit no better than a lame bull caribou, while reminding the other, also, how she had once said that rather than take such a man she would marry a carcajou and raise side-hill *bungelaros*. Often she would express a deeper sympathy by gifts of tobacco—a more practical demonstration, as well as one readily understood and appreciated.

In the beginning of September, Wahaneetah and Walking Rabbit started on their annual hunting and trapping. Walking Rabbit's hunting-grounds were in the neighborhood of Lake Bistcha, which is near the head of Black River, a tributary of the Liard. It was not an easy country to get into, as there were many long portages, one of which was nearly five miles across a range of hills. Besides, there were quite four days of canoeing up Beaver River. Walking Rabbit, however, had gravely informed Thelma that now it would not be so hard upon him, as he had a woman. At his reply Thelma had felt even more sorrow for her lazy, good-natured friend, and on saying good-by had pressed a more generous gift of tobacco than usual into Wahaneetah's hands.

THE day after Wahaneetah's departure Yonson had called his daughter into the store to ask her for the list of articles he had dictated to her from the little store-room at the back, before they had gone to Fort Simpson. Thelma remembered perfectly and a minute later handed him the list, which he carried into the store-room without examining it.

When Thelma again saw her father, possibly a quarter of an hour later, he was standing in the front of the store reading something. Thelma was sitting idly upon

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the bed in her room looking out of the window. The front door of the store was not more than a dozen paces from where she sat, and while Yonson could be seen quite plainly by his daughter she could not be so plainly seen by him, owing to her position in the shadow of the room.

It suddenly struck Thelma that her father's face was very red and undoubtedly growing redder. It was evident, too, that he was getting excited, because on finishing his reading he hastily folded up the paper and, thrusting it into his pocket, struck his fist into the palm of his hand and began swearing. Then he shouted:

"Thelma!" in loud peremptory tones.

"Yes, father." Thelma appeared at the window.

"I want you here! Now! Dis minute. Come queek! Gosh de ting, dis ees too much!" As soon as Yacob Yonson got either angry or excited, or both, his English became questionable. When his daughter joined him a moment later he was reading the paper again.

"Coome here wit' me, girl." Whenever the big Dane addressed his daughter as "girl," she knew that he was very angry.

She followed him behind the counter in some bewilderment and quite in ignorance as to the cause of his anger. With a gesture, dramatic in its very hugeness and slow deliberation, he spread the sheet of paper on the counter and struck it with his hand; then drawing himself to his great height he filled his lungs with a mighty intake of his breath, squared his shoulders and exclaimed:

"What is dat mean, girl? Tell me queek! I am very angree."

Now if there was one person in all the wide world of whom Thelma was not in the least little bit afraid, that person was her big father. Thelma looked at him.

"I was not knowing what you were talking about," she said.

"Read dat!" He placed a huge forefinger on the paper.

Thelma picked up the paper. Woman-like, she looked at the ending first. The signature, "John Edward Thorndice," for a moment puzzled her, for she had forgotten the will. Next she read "Achittimo, his mark," and noted the straggling cross his unaccustomed hand had drawn.

Then the stupid joke came to her in a flash, together with all the useless fooling of that morning in the store when she had sold herself to that "Jack Man," as she and Wahaneetah called him. She looked up at her father, towering above her with his angry eyes. Again he spoke:

"Thelma, what does it mean? Spik, girl."

"I was wondering," she said slowly, "how ever did you get this paper?"

"I will show you very queek." Taking the paper, he folded it as it had been when his daughter had handed it to him, with only the list showing. "That is the way I get the paper, girl; see? Now you tell me what this paper mean. I think, maybe, you like the boys too much."

"Do you really think so, father?" she remarked unconcernedly, adding: "It was only that fool Jack man. He was always making love to me, you know."

Then she told him the whole story easily and naturally, for she had no feeling for the Jack man, other than aversion. She even told how he had tried to kiss her and how she had threatened him with her knife; at which the big Dane had laughed and sworn that she was "the stuff, by yiminy!"

"But Thelma," he had said to her when she had finished her story, "you must not fool with the boys now, no more. You belong to that tall boy at the Post, just the same as if you go to the priest wit' him, for you promise him, you know. He's a fine boy, Thelma. You be a goot girl." He patted her affectionately on the shoulder as he finished speaking.

"All right, you big man. You not very angree now? By yiminy!" She looked very beautiful as she mimicked him with her head on one side.

The "big man" laughed. "I will beat you one of these days, you monkey girl," he said.

His daughter made a face at him. And so they chaffed, for they loved each other.

CHAPTER X

SOME NEWS OF THE JACK MAN

THE quiet time of the year was now beginning at the little trading-post on Lake Kakisa. One by one the different families of Indians had nearly all taken their departure to their Winter hunting-grounds. Achittimo was one of the last to leave, for his country was easier of access than many of the others, being distant but

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five or six days' canoeing, against the current, to the west, at the head of Beaver River and to the north of Wapoose Lake.

A day or two before Achittimo started on his Winter hunt he visited the store, to get the necessary "trade" in provisions, ammunition and traps, to take with him. Both Thelma and her father were in the store. As Achittimo was leaving he beckoned to the former, who accompanied him outside to the front of the building. Arrived there the Indian squatted upon his heels. With the utmost deliberation he proceeded to fill and light his pipe. When it was going to his entire satisfaction he began to talk:

"Marten-skin very good trade this year." Achittimo began the conversation in English, for he was very proud of his command of the whites' language.

"Very good trade." Thelma acquiesced.

"Beaver I don't think he's good, not yet?"

"No good." Thelma shook her head. "The White Father (the King) says you must not take beaver for five years."

Thelma seated herself on the ground before him, on her heels. She spoke, as she always did, in the Yellowknife dialect.

"Musk-ox?"

Again Thelma shook her head. She was quite well aware that Achittimo had not brought her out to discuss trade with her, but also knew that she would have to allow him to approach the real subject of interest in his own roundabout fashion. Where they were sitting the ground was very sandy. Achittimo slowly and with extreme care leveled a space with his hand and with a stick drew figures in it. He spoke again.

"Walking Rabbit beat Wahaneetah with a stick just before he go hunting. Wahaneetah sing all same cat. It was very funny. Walking Rabbit have plenty fun with his squaw. I get a pain here—" he placed a hand on his stomach—"I laugh so hard. Maybe some night Wahaneetah will put a knife into Walking Rabbit when he sleeps. Then the time will come for Wahaneetah to laugh."

"Only fools play with death," said Thelma.

Achittimo shrugged his shoulders, then he began again to level off a second little space of sand. Suddenly he desisted. Leaning toward Thelma, he addressed her in the language of his tribe.

"Where is that white man?" he inquired.

"I was not knowing which white man," said Thelma.

"He who wrote on the paper which is to give you many dollars—on the paper upon which I wrote?" said Achittimo proudly.

"I was not knowing," said Thelma.

"I know," said the Indian and placed his two hands upon his breast.

"He is a wolf!" said Thelma, in a sudden flame of rage, "and his father is the father of liars——" The gust of anger and dislike which had borne her thus far died.

"It may even be as you say . . . perhaps," said Achittimo, and he looked at her curiously, for the memory of the sale was in his mind. "The ways of a woman with a man are deeper than a lake which has no bottom," he thought to himself. Aloud he said: "I know where the white man's tent stands, but the reason of his camping is strange and troubles me."

"I was not knowing where his tent stands," said Thelma.

"There is a stream which runs into Beaver River," Achittimo continued, "a half-day's journey below Wapoose Lake; where it joins the river, among many small balsam trees, his canoe is cached. Up the stream, as far as from here to the point of Three Rocks (about three miles), his tent stands, while all the day he puts earth and gravel into a long, narrow box through which the stream runs swiftly. Tell me, Thelma, is the white man mad?"

"It may be so, Achittimo. I can not say. But how did you find all that out? You have been near the Post all Summer."

"It is a story that the brother of my woman's aunt told me. He did say that while he looked for birch-bark about that country he came upon the white man's tent. Then he did lie behind the root of a spruce-tree and watch the man through a great shift of the sun, and always the man carried much earth and gravel without resting to the long box.

"And the flies were very many and hungry about him, and his face did bleed, and he cursed the flies in the name of his God, as is the way with white men. And when at last the sun was above his head he did stop in his madness and standing beside the box he did look into it and say many words in a loud voice, and he did raise his hand while he spoke, so that the brother of my woman's aunt did fear greatly. Can you not tell me what it all means, Thelma?"

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But Thelma would not though she knew. She only laughed and said, "The man is mad, Achittimo."

Many times, after what Achittimo had told her, Thelma thought fearfully of the Jack man; but, with the foolishness of a maid, she would say nothing of those thoughts to her father, though she would have received only comfort had she done so. In her heart she feared the Jack man because of his mind's strength and a quality of unflinching resolution that was written on his face, and the deviltry in him.

CHAPTER XI

THELMA KNOWS DELIGHT AND DREAD

ABOUT the middle of October, when all the Indians had gone away to their hunting-grounds for the Winter, and the ice was strong enough to travel on, there came a strange Indian with a team of four good dogs. He arrived about noon and at once went into the store, where he found both Yonson and his daughter.

With the extraordinary dilatoriness of an Indian he purchased first the brightest and cheapest handkerchief in the store and two small plugs of chewing-tobacco. The Indian bargained with Yonson while Thelma sat by the stove and watched him.

Of a sudden it struck her that his face was familiar. He took quite an hour in purchasing the tobacco and handkerchief. When he had done so he walked leisurely to the stove, where he filled and lighted his pipe. Of a sudden he glanced up, caught the girl's eyes and grinned broadly.

"I have seen you before," said Thelma.

"Yes," he replied with a slow seriousness.

"When did I see you, and where was it?"

"In the Summer moon, at Simpson."

"What? Simpson!" Thelma sat bolt upright.

The Indian grinned more broadly.

"When did you leave Simpson?"

The Indian counted with extreme care and deliberation upon his fingers. "It is now twelve days," he said.

"Twelve days ago! And there is no letter?" exclaimed Thelma.

"Yes," said he, "I have a letter."

"Give it to me," said the girl and held her hand out for it.

"The young white man at the big store gave it to me, saying, 'Take care of it, Adick; it is big medicine. It is for the white woman at Lake Kakisa.' " He produced something wrapped in brown paper as he spoke and handed it to Thelma.

It was the first letter she had ever received from any one. It consisted of a flat, oblong package neatly folded in brown paper, sealed with red wax and addressed to "Miss Thelma Yonson, Lake Kakisa." She studied the address in an awed delight and broke the seal.

Inside the brown wrapper she found that the letter was still contained in a white envelope, also addressed to "Miss Thelma Yonson." The importance of the conventional address she found most thrilling. In a measure, as she read the superscription, she held herself in contemplation from the standpoint of another individual.

She had never before realized the existence of a Miss Thelma Yonson. The dignity of the prefix suggested a valuable importance hitherto not reckoned in her own estimation. Between a Miss and a Mrs. the chasm did not yawn so widely. Miss Thelma Yonson contrasted with Mrs. Rupert Nairn with less abruptness than did plain Thelma. She felt now that the change, though sweetly terrible, might be more easily faced. She beheld her shyness, in shadowy perspective as it were, in a pose of daring which almost made her blush.

With eager, trembling fingers she opened the white envelope and drew from it the first love-letter she had ever seen.

The endearment of the opening words, "My darling Thelma," made her catch her breath. The page lived to her. She felt the hot blood pulsing in her cheeks. There were twelve pages in all. Into much of the matter Rupert had poured a fervent heart.

There was news, too—such news for her, for them! Mr. Murdock's son had written that he would not return to the wilderness to live. The attractions of such a civilization as little places like Calgary and Edmonton afforded had proved too much for a weak head, and he had determined to accept a position offered him in Calgary, the place of ceaseless wind and dust storms.

In consequence Mr. Murdock had asked Rupert Nairn if he would stay on permanently, an offer which he informed Thelma he had accepted. It now only remained to have the appointment confirmed by the head office in Winnipeg.

Nairn went on to say that if he got the position he was to get a month's holiday

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beginning on or about the day of his appointment, which could not very well be later than the middle of November. He would come to see her then, and should reach Lake Kakisa by the beginning of December, or certainly not later than the fifth.

He told her, too, that a silver fox had denned up in the woods behind the Post, within a quarter of a mile of the big log that crossed the trail. (She remembered the log so well! It was the very one over which he had helped her. His several references to spots she knew added a happy realism to the letter.)

Furthermore, the ptarmigan were more plentiful that Winter than any one had ever known them to be. "It is hot ptarmigan at one meal, cold ptarmigan at another, ptarmigan with bread-sauce at a third and deviled ptarmigan at a fourth." Thelma laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks, she thought the letter was so funny.

Thelma was so happy! She must read the funny portions to her father, who struck his hands together, swore his "by yiminies," and laughed his mighty laugh. All the wonderful news, too, she told her father, who thought the chances were that Rupert would get the position, for Mr. Murdock thought most highly of him and declared that there was no better judge of furs in all the north country than Rupert Nairn.

It did Thelma good to hear her lover so praised. She glowed with happy pride. Nevertheless she asked her father, with some show of indignation, why he had not told her so before, and he laughed. Unfeeling man! But poor girl, she could not answer that wonderful letter, for the bearer, Adick, would not return to Fort Simpson before the following Summer.

Thelma found that portion of the Winter, from Adick's visit until Christmas, the longest and dreariest she had ever known, for she was yearning with all her heart and soul for her lover. That silence with no word to break its cruel monotony was very hard to bear. She fought against a brooding, quiet idleness that was laying its touch upon her. She set herself tasks. She would improve herself for that tall lover of hers. She would make herself more worthy of his great love. Such was her proud humility. So for that purpose she read, or rather studied, the few books—fortunately good ones—left by her mother. And every day, too, she worked, sometimes for hours, upon her writing, until by dint of unremitting practise she acquired a very pretty hand indeed, or so she thought.

Yet often she would be stricken by those spells of silence which Wahaneetah had noticed, when work of any kind at all seemed an impossibility, when she would yield herself entirely to thoughts of Rupert Nairn and love, and of those delightful walks along the trail at Simpson, and of her lover's arms about her, and of his lips upon her lips.

Through that long Winter, too, there was one hateful reflection that troubled her at times. Christmas approached, when any Indians, not too far away, would visit her father's store for the season's little jollification, for the trader always gave small presents at that season. As Yuletide drew nearer and nearer, that thought became a dread. For at Christmas-time John Thorndice had said he would return.

The story that Achittimo had told her of his mining made that dread the greater. She would often recall, too vividly for her peace of mind, his manner of certainty as to finding the gold. Intuitively she realized his wicked cleverness and courage.

She remembered the words, "I not come back, and you here?" Their scoffing note of unbelief in such an unlikely circumstance rang in her mind.

She told herself, "He may forget me," or "Something might prevent him," but knew the thought was folly. What was there in her world that could master his will of iron? At such times she seemed to feel his hand upon her wrist, to hear again his wicked laughter, and mark the cruelty of his smile.

Then she would assure herself that her father was the bigger, stronger man, and so could easily shield her. Her mind would lean upon that strength of his, till, as a prop is pulled away, the comfort of such thought would of a sudden leave her, and she would know, beyond all shadow of a doubt, that Thorndice was, in a sense, the stronger man.

CHAPTER XII

HOW THE WHITE MAN'S GOD HELPED WAHANEETAH

AT LENGTH November passed. The slow days dragged wearily into that month she feared yet longed for. She spent the hours now watching two trails, that

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one from the north by which her happiness would come, and that other from the west by which she looked for Thorndice. The thought that on the fifth, now but three days distant, she might see her lover again was too great a happiness.

The third day came at last, and then the fourth. And all that fourth the sky was overcast with racing clouds. There was no wind. The dogs slunk fearfully about the buildings with drooping tails and whining softly. Across the lake wolves howled.

The calm held with a slumbering menace until noon. Then, from the north, the storm burst in a driving hurricane. The cold was awful. It was a day on which no man could travel. The fifth day came. Still that wild storm threatened the lonely post. All day it raged. That evening while Thelma and her father ate their supper, in a brief moment, or so it seemed, the wind died flat.

The sudden change, from storm to calm, was startling. In another hour no tiny vestige of a cloud marred the stilled depths of heaven. The Northern Lights danced madly once again. That night, in her little room, Thelma thanked the Blessed Virgin for the fair weather, for she had prayed to her for it.

Another fortnight passed. Still her lover did not come. She knew now that the appointment had been denied him, and braced her courage for the long wait until the Summer-time. She had only Christmas now, to look forward to—to Christmas and her dread of Thorndice, the certainty of whose arrival became a harassing obsession. In the very marrow of her being she felt that he would not fail her. He would come. Misfortune comes so surely.

It now lacked but four days to Christmas, and Thelma had become a creature of nerves, forever watching the trail across the lake to the west. During that last week the weather was fine. The deep blue overhead scintillated with a million stars. The brilliant Northern Lights flashed in a gorgeous dance of dazzling color in the sky, making that white, frozen world almost as clear as day.

Early in the morning Thelma rearranged some trade on one of the shelves in the store. Suddenly the loud barking of the dogs announced an arrival. At the sound Thelma stepped back a pace and clutched her dress. At the moment her father was putting wood in the stove and did not see her. He straightened up and smiled.

The barking of the dogs was a most welcome sound to him, and for the past few days he had listened for it. In all probability it heralded change, trade, customers and life!

"They are coming at last, Thelma," he said.

He moved toward the door as he spoke and his daughter followed him. A moment later they were watching two teams of dogs, with their complement of human figures, approaching the store across the lake.

Thelma's mind was relieved at once. She knew that Thorndice had no dogs with him, that when he arrived he would haul his sleigh himself. Many times Indians journeyed that way to their Winter hunting-grounds, especially when they had not far to go. In the afternoon another dog-team reached the post and there was a bustle of life about the place again.

For the remainder of that day and all of the next until toward supper-time there were no more arrivals, when Thelma, happening to go outside, saw a solitary figure following a train of four dogs. The afternoon was bitterly cold, and in a few moments Thelma was driven back into the store for shelter. She found her father leaning on the counter when she returned, and chatting with an Indian by the name of Negicawse (the little otter), so called because of his small size and skilfulness in a canoe. Moquaw (the bear), Ahmeek (the beaver), and an Indian girl, Agawsin Sheship (the little duck), were also in the store. Thelma told the girl that some one was coming and continued on into her room. There she had a stove with a big wood-box which Edward, the general factotum about the place, always kept filled. Thelma had replenished the fire and made herself comfortable in a big easy chair before it, when the dogs announced another arrival.

That afternoon Thelma was lazy, her room nice and warm and her big chair, with its deerskin seat, exceedingly pleasant. Besides, she was not curious about the new arrival, who could only be the solitary figure she had seen approaching with the four dogs.

Thelma rose to her feet, drew a curtain across the window and lighted a lamp supported on a bracket screwed into the wall behind her. Then she seated herself again

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before the fire. Hardly had she done so when the sound of some one at the door, and a muffled, clumsy knock, attracted her attention.

"*Miajaw omah* (walk in)," Thelma called out.

The door was pushed open and a woman entered slowly, awkwardly. At first Thelma did not recognize her. She carried a Winchester carbine which she stood against the wall, behind the door.

The woman greeted Thelma in the Yellowknife dialect, rubbed her hands together and moved across the room toward the stove. At the sound of her voice Thelma glanced sharply at her. But the woman's face was muffled as if it were out-of-doors, so that there was but little of it visible, and still Thelma did not recognize her.

When the woman reached the stove she pulled the fur cap she wore from her head and looked at Thelma with grave, unsmiling eyes. There was a curious expression of stillness about the dark face—a look of patience and brooding melancholy. She was standing in the glow of the lamplight, her somber eyes upon the white woman.

Thelma sprang to her feet.

"Wahaneetah!" she exclaimed.

Thelma caught the half-breed by the shoulders and pulling her close with a quick, impulsive effort, kissed her. At the same instant her eye took in a changed appearance of her figure.

"Then it must have been you I saw crossing the lake, alone, with four dogs?"

"Surely," said Wahaneetah.

SUDDENLY Thelma realized the full import of her words. But "Why alone?" she asked herself. Where was Walking Rabbit? She recalled to mind Achittimo's words: "Maybe some night Wahaneetah will put a knife into Walking Rabbit when he sleeps. Then the time will come for Wahaneetah to laugh." Had that time come for Wahaneetah?

Thelma looked at her in an awed silence, but the dark, still face of the woman before her, with its air of repression and its melancholy, did not look like the face of a woman who could easily laugh. Thelma leaned forward in her big chair and her hands gripped its arms, she did not realize how tightly. Her eyes with their mute questions and condemnation were on Wahaneetah's face.

"Wahaneetah——" Thelma paused.

"What would you know of me, my friend?" asked Wahaneetah in her slow, soft voice.

Still Thelma did not speak, but only looked at her.

"I am waiting, Thelma."

Wahaneetah stood with her slim, strong hands extended toward the stove.

"You came alone?" said Thelma, and in her voice there was hushed excitement.

"I came alone," responded Wahaneetah quietly.

"Tell me, Wahaneetah, where is Walking Rabbit?"

Still there was that same quality of excitement in her voice. It seemed to attract the attention of the half-breed, for she looked at her questioner a moment, ere replying:

"Walking Rabbit is dead, Thelma."

"Dead! Walking Rabbit dead!"

Thelma stared at the woman before her, while into her fixed eyes a look of horror crept. Thelma's life had been passed among savages, both red and white, but she had never before known a murderer. She felt that she knew it all now. Wahaneetah had stabbed him to death while he slept beside her. Thelma shuddered at the thought.

The callous hardihood, too, of the woman made it doubly awful—to come into her room, as she did, and tell her all about it. She looked at Wahaneetah in a silence that was tense, repeating in a dazed way,

"Dead! Walking Rabbit dead!"

"It is even as you say, Thelma."

Thelma found her voice at last. Her shaken nerves regained their equable poise, to some extent. She straightened in her chair and began to question Wahaneetah.

"I was wondering, Wahaneetah, how did Walking Rabbit die?"

"It is a story, Thelma, that will take me a little time to tell."

She took a pipe from somewhere in the folds of her clothes and struck it on the palm of her hand. Then she looked into the bowl and said, "My pipe is empty and for two days I have not seen tobacco."

"There is tobacco, Wahaneetah." Thelma pointed to her table.

When Wahaneetah had filled and lighted her pipe, and it was going to her entire satisfaction, she seated herself on the floor, with her back against the wall, and began:

"I am going to have a baby, Thelma."

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"I know it, Wahaneetah," Thelma replied.

"Yes," said Wahaneetah, slowly.

For a few moments she smoked in silence before she continued: "Walking Rabbit and I were friends for many moons before I lived with him as his squaw. He was good to me then. The evenings we spent together among the alders were very pleasant. Many times he would say to me, 'Live with me in my lodge, Wahaneetah, and I will care for you always, and your heart will sing.'

"Then, because I was a fool, I went with him to his lodge, but in it I did not know happiness, and my heart was heavy. Soon afterward, as you know, Walking Rabbit began to beat me, not because I was lazy or a thief, but because it pleased him greatly when I cried out with pain.

"Now, Thelma, it did not so much matter when it was only me that he hurt, but then there was that other life, more to me than my own, that I must guard, and I was afraid lest he would kill it in beating me. Often I would cry out to him: 'Man, you will surely kill your child.' But he would only laugh at my words.

"Then I swore upon a dying fire—which, as you know, is a custom among my mother's people—that if he injured my little baby I would surely kill him, and always as the child grew the danger to it became the greater.

"Now about the beginning of December moon we did move our tepee to the mouth of a stream called Stinking Marten Creek, which runs into the Black River at the head of Man-without-a-Paddle Rapids. Now where Stinking Marten Creek joins Black River there is always, at one place, rotten ice that is never strong enough to carry even a running fox.

"On the day we put up our tepee at the mouth of the creek, Walking Rabbit did beat me worse than he had ever done before, because, while stretching the skin of a white weasel, which I myself did catch, I did tear it about the length of my little finger-joint. Thelma, it was on the morning of that day that he did beat me."

Wahaneetah sat up straight and an intent and solemn note came into her voice. "When Walking Rabbit beat me that time I did make no sound for the very heart in my body, then, was calling for his blood.

"Once, Thelma, I did know a Holy Father. It was when I was a girl, before I did know trouble and the ways of evil men. I did live for two Summers, in those happy days, with my mother, near Fort Chippewayan on Lake Athabasca. It was there that I did know that priest.

"He was a fat man with a great stomach, and always he did laugh, ha, ha! But he was a good man, very good, very honest, and he did love all of us. And always he would tell us about a man who was a great medicine-man, who lived long ago, when the world was young, named Jesus Christ, who loved the poor Indians just as much as the white men. He said he loved the Eskimos too, and——"

"Yes," said Thelma. "But it's mighty hard to believe. They're so dirty."

Wahaneetah shrugged her shoulders. "Do you want to hear how Walking Rabbit died?"

"You bet I do."

"Then shut up. How can I tell a story when you talk all the time?" They looked at one another for a moment in silence.

"Go on, go on, Wahaneetah. I won't say a little word."

"Well," continued Wahaneetah, "the priest did tell me how the white man's God would not let people suffer, and how He did die for all of us, and afterward He went to a place called Heaven, where the weather is always very fine, not cold and wet and windy like here; where His Father has a big lodge, and always plenty of tea and tobacco——"

"Tobacco!" exclaimed Thelma.

"Of course, tobacco. What's the good of a place without tobacco, anyway? Can't you shut up?"

"All right, all right. I never see anybody so cross."

"You'd make anybody cross. You'd make a fish cross. I never see such a girl. Well, the good priest told me, too, that the white man's God did punish all cruel and wicked men, and that He did love little children.

"So when Walking Rabbit did beat me that day, I thought 'I will tell the white man's God all about it.' And I did. I went into the bush and I did kneel upon my knees, as the good priest told me.

"I did kneel in the snow, while I called in a loud voice to the white man's God: 'Jesus Christ, Walking Rabbit will surely kill my child if you do not take better care

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of it;' and I said, too, 'It is not for myself that I care, but only for my little baby.' "

"Did you pray to Him in Yellowknife, Wahaneetah?"

"Surely, Thelma. You know I don't speak English. Why?"

"I was thinking, perhaps He does not understand Yellowknife."

"Of course He understands Yellowknife."

"Go on, go on!"

"Well, it was a little time after I did tell the white man's God, perhaps two hours, when Walking Rabbit went out of the tepee. He had gone only some little minutes when I did hear:

" 'Wahaneetah, Wahaneetah, come to me quickly,' and the voice did come from the river.

"Then I rose up painfully, for the soreness of the blows he dealt me was still heavy upon me, and I went slowly toward the river, groaning and limping as I walked. And ever as I walked he did continually call loudly, 'Wahaneetah, come to me quickly.' "

"WHEN I did come to the bank of the river his voice sounded from the rotten ice, but a little way from the bank. Then I did look out across the ice, and the day was nearly as bright as when the sun shines, for there was much dancing light across the whole sky, from where it rests upon the earth, to where it rests upon the earth; and there, Thelma, at the edge of the rotten ice was the head of Walking Rabbit, so I called to him:

" 'I am surely coming, Walking Rabbit,' and I limped slowly toward him.

"Then, as I drew near him, the thought came to me, 'The white man's God has heard me praying for my baby,' and I went more slowly.

"Then Walking Rabbit did call again to me and say, 'Hurry woman, hurry, for the water is cold and the cruel current drags me under the ice and I can not hold on much longer.'

"But as I walked painfully I was thinking, and I thought: 'The white man's God has done this thing for me and my little baby. Surely it would be both folly and wickedness for me, a mere woman, to interfere with the will of such a God.'

"So when I had got close to the edge of the rotten ice, and about the distance of two rifle-lengths from the head of Walking Rabbit, I did sit down and look into his face, and while I looked the thought came to me that it was uglier than anything I had ever before looked upon. And he did blow out his cheeks, and his mouth did move from side to side, and his teeth did make a rattling in his mouth, because of the coldness of the water, and only with the tips of his fingers he did hold to the edge of the ice. Once the fingers of one hand did slip and I thought he was gone, and his face was hidden by the water, but with a great effort he caught again to the edge of the ice.

"Then he spoke to me, but his voice had grown thick with the cold in him, and he said, 'Will you not help me out, Wahaneetah?' and all his teeth showed like the teeth of a hungry wolf.

"Then I did answer him and say, 'If I help you out you will beat me as you have often done before, Walking Rabbit.'

"And he did say to me, 'I would never beat you again, Wahaneetah, but I would care for you always.'

"And his voice was growing thicker because of the cold water, but I replied to him, 'I would be a fool indeed were I to believe you.'

"After that we looked at one another in silence for a little time. Then of a sudden he did draw himself high up so that his whole head was above the water and he did turn his head backward very far, and his eyes did roll up into his head so that I could see only that part which is white. Then he did let himself down slowly, loosening his hold upon the ice with his fingers, and so he did pass away from me, under the ice, and leave me a free woman."

"Wahaneetah," said Thelma, "you would have indeed been a fool if you had helped Walking Rabbit out. What you have told me pleases me greatly."

"Then, Thelma, when I did get back to the tepee I made up the fire and I did sit upon my blankets, and I did hug my knees with my arms, and the baby in me stirred, and I said 'Rest quietly my baby, for your life will never more be in danger because of your mother's beatings; the white man's God has heard your mother's prayers, little one. He is your friend.'

"I laughed and laughed and laughed, for I thought, 'Now I am alone, my child is safe, and I have many things; a rifle, many traps, blankets, two axes—a big one and a small one—much wire to catch the rabbits

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with, flour, sugar, tea, bacon and tobacco.' Truly I thought, 'I am now a rich woman, all men will think highly of me, and the trail I follow will be pleasant, and my child will walk beside me on the trail, my little child, and there will be sunshine in my life.' I had many skins, too, for Walking Rabbit had taken much fur. And so I began to look forward to a little happiness.

"Of a truth I was rich beyond the dreams of women, and I laughed again, for I was very happy thinking of my little baby. And while I thought of him he put up his little hand, his little soft hand, Thelma, and he laid it on my heart, and he pressed it, Thelma, he pressed it very lightly like the shadow of a flower, and he pressed it first upon one side and then upon the other with his little fingers. And all the big world was in my heart, the joy and the brightness and the sorrow of it, Thelma, and the tears were in my eyes, Thelma, the tears of love.

"And I thought of all the beauty and the sunshine of the world, Thelma; and, Thelma, I cried. I cried as I sat alone in my tepee, for then I knew happiness—happiness and the sorrow of happiness, for my baby's hands were holding my heart, and it struggled in his two hands, like a happy bird, Thelma. But he was strong, my little baby, and he would not let it go.

"Now for two months I had not smoked my pipe. Then I went to Walking Rabbit's store of tobacco, and I found that he had a good store, for besides what he had got from your father in trade he had taken all from me that you gave me when I left with him——"

"He was a thieving wolf," said Thelma.

"Yes," continued Wahaneetah, "and he had also taken much from Achittimo at chuckie-stones. So I filled my pipe and smoked. Then, Thelma, I did continue to trap and hunt until I started down here, and I did well—better even than Walking Rabbit had ever done, I think. But the white man's God helps me now, I know, for the big priest at Chippewayan told me He would, and he knows."

"I was thinking," said Thelma slowly, "that sometimes it may be better, after all, to die a maid." As she spoke she looked at Wahaneetah.

"There have been days and nights," her friend replied, "when I have thought so too."

CHAPTER XIII

HOW ACHITTIMO'S FATHER DIED

THELMA was delighted to have her friend Wahaneetah back with her again, to gossip with and to discuss the probability of the Jack man's return. She discovered, too, that talking of it restored, to some extent, her courage.

Quite a dozen times she had put the question to the half-breed, "Do you think he will come back?"

Then Wahaneetah would look at her, noting her beautiful face with its vivid coloring, and she would reply:

"He is a man, Thelma. All men will remember and go a long way for the beauty of a woman, and you are as pretty as a dream of love."

"Men are brutes," Thelma would say in anger, ignoring the compliment.

"It may be so," Wahaneetah would respond in her slow way, "but men are men, just the same."

Meanwhile the days were passing quickly. Christmas would be with them on the morrow. In that week but three more families of Indians had arrived, and still the Jack man did not come. Now of all those who traded with the big Dane there were but two Indians from whom Thelma might look for news of the Englishman. One was Achittimo, and the other Achittimo's wife's uncle, he who had watched the Englishman at his mining. But unfortunately thus far neither of those Indians had arrived.

All the morning of that last day both Thelma and Wahaneetah were very busy decorating the little store with wreaths and ropes of spruce tied together with string and hung about the walls and ceiling. They had also to make many little bags of cotton and fill every one with cheap sweets, a bag to be given to each Indian girl and woman with best wishes for a merry Christmas.

By noon the decorations of the store were finished and a heap of little bags were bulging with their indigestible contents. Thelma and her father at length adjourned for their midday meal. Just as they were finishing it, each and every dog about the place began to bark.

"Some one," said Thelma, with a sudden catching of her breath.

"Doubtless," remarked her father. He shrugged his great shoulders and laughed.

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"Who can it be, I wonder?"

Again her father shrugged.

The loud chorus of the dogs increased in volume, then gradually died out. A little later the door of their dining-room was pushed open to admit of Wahaneetah's dark face.

"Thelma," said Wahaneetah.

"Yes," said Thelma, and turned her face, which of a sudden had assumed a fixed expression, to her friend.

"Another man is coming."

"Yes," said Thelma in a lower voice. The sudden intake of her breath, her tightening lips, and the gravity that sprang into her eyes, all told her emotions.

"He has his squaw with him."

Thelma's face lost its rigidity.

"There are four dogs in his team, and there is a fifth dog following. I think it is Achittimo," said Wahaneetah.

"Yes," said Thelma. The relief she felt was almost more than she could bear in silence.

"Achittimo," said Yonson, and added, "I had almost given up Achittimo."

The first person Thelma encountered in the store after her luncheon was Achittimo, but there were several others in the store as well, and Thelma could get no chance of talking to him.

That afternoon Thelma was more nervous and harassed by the dread of Thorndice than she had ever been before. An idea possessed her mind that Achittimo could give her news of the vagrant Englishman whom she dreaded, and now, though Achittimo had come, she could not get a word with him.

She spent that afternoon alone in her room, in the easy chair before the fire, her hands lying idly in her lap. She could not work and her mind was too preoccupied to read. Suddenly she was thinking of Rupert Nairn.

The change relieved a mind persecuted by horrid thoughts of what that other man might attempt should he arrive. She thought of those happy days that she and her lover had passed together on that trail behind her father's little tent at Simpson.

"Now," she told herself, "I am thinking of him. Is he, too, thinking of me? But I am only a girl." At that moment, to her, a girl seemed very small indeed.

To-morrow would be Christmas Day. She glanced through the little window at the illimitable stretch of snow-clad desolation, and, perhaps for the first time, that empty outlook hurt her. A merry Christmas! Her mind was touched with a little bitterness at the thought.

"Will his Christmas be a merry one away from me?" she wondered. And then she told herself that this was the most unhappy Christmas she had ever known.

"Will he forget me?" she asked. "Does he ever look at the little bag I worked for him? Perhaps some other girl has come to Simpson. Ah!" she cried, "I fear he has forgotten me, my lover. I am indeed a wretched girl and my heart is breaking in this frozen loneliness." Hiding her face in her hands, she wept.

All that afternoon and evening was an unhappy time for Thelma. Generally she slept well. That night, however, she could not sleep at all, but lay in tortured wakefulness till morning.

Christmas, to which she had always looked forward with pleasure, was but a nightmare now to oppress her thoughts. The cheery morning greetings, the season's harmless convivialities observed at the generality of trading-posts of any consequence, and always indulged in at theirs, poor Thelma now looked forward to with dread.

That there was no getting out of it for her, she knew.

THE morning came at length—a bitter, cheerless morning. At breakfast with her father, she endeavored to fall in with his jovial Christmas manner. Afterward she went into the store for something. Her father had gone into the little room behind the store, where he would be busy for an hour at least. The Indians would not begin to arrive for two hours.

She found what she was looking for, a pair of scissors, and was about to turn back to the dining-room, when—she did not know why—instead of doing so she went to the door, opened it, and looked out.

The morning was still and very cold. There was not a single vestige of a cloud in the great dome overhead. The stars glittered frostily. The Aurora Borealis danced in a brilliant shimmering splendor.

A sound like the roll of musketry swept suddenly across the lake. It was the ice cracking! Three great shaggy dogs were seated side by side in a row. One raised his muzzle heavenward and howled dis-

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mally. The other two joined in the lament.

As Thelma was about to close the door an Indian appeared from behind the building, saw her and approached. A moment later Thelma recognized Achittimo.

"Come here," she said. "Come here this minute." She spoke and beckoned to him peremptorily.

He came at once, for they all acknowledged her prerogative of ordering sharply. Her beauty, even in those barbarous surroundings, had its privileges.

The Indian came to her with his white teeth gleaming in a friendly grin. He wished her a merry Christmas as the two shook hands. She bade him follow her and, after closing the door, led the way into the dining-room.

Arrived there she pointed to a chair and told him to sit down. Closing the door, she turned up the light of a lamp in a bracket on the wall. Achittimo watched her curiously, the lamplight making black shadows on his lean, swarthy face. She spoke quickly.

"Achittimo," she said, "where is that mad white man?"

"I will tell you of him, Flower-Face," he replied. Achittimo was rather given to complimenting her in that manner, but she paid no heed to him.

"Have you tobacco?" she asked him.

He drew a pipe from a capacious tobacco-bag he carried at his belt and looked gravely into the bowl. He then raised his eyes to hers and disclosed his teeth in a broad smile. His smile and glance said as plainly as words, "I have no tobacco but I would not lower myself by begging for any."

Like all his race Achittimo was a beggar, and like them all, too, if circumstances at times forced him to adopt mendicancy he could at least be dignified about it. And so he smiled as if, one might say, he was surprised and a little amused at being placed in so unusual a predicament.

Now Achittimo, like many Indians, was a born story teller, in a roundabout fashion. And when he had been supplied with a square inch of plug-tobacco which Yonson had left on the table and had filled and lighted his pipe, he crossed his legs and, clasping his bony hands about a knee, he began:

"The weather is cold and there is much snow upon the ice. Truly I have not seen a colder Winter since I was a little boy and lived with my father and my good old mother.

"Often she would say to me, 'Achittimo, you are small, but your heart is as big as the heart of a musk-ox.' And I would reply, 'It is even as you say, my good mother.' Then she would light her pipe and smoke, and, if my old father was not about, there would be peace in the tepee.

"I remember that Summer well. We took much fish and killed many deer, till about the time when the geese and ducks get together in great bands, and the fresh snow is getting low upon the mountains, which is near the beginning of the cold Winter. At that time my old father had three bear-traps set on the banks of a little stream which runs into Buffalo River, for he was trading that season at Fort Resolution which is on the Great Slave Lake, and Burnt Islands are before it in the lake, and the story of how a priest and a bear and the timber on the islands was burned is a strange story and if you are wishing to hear it I will gladly tell it to you."

"I am very thankful to you, Achittimo," Thelma replied, "but I was not wanting to hear it to-day. I would sooner hear the story of the mad white man. Another day it will please me greatly to hear the strange story of Burnt Islands."

"It is well, Flower-Face," said Achittimo, and continued the story he had begun.

"One day my good mother did spill some tobacco, about a pipeful, and while she did pick it up from the ground my old father came in, and he did see her picking something from the ground beside the fire, in the tepee. Then he said to her: 'Wild Swan,' for that was the name my old father called my good mother, but it was not the name the Company's man at Fort Resolution called her. He called her 'Pudden-Face,' but I am not knowing what it means, 'Pudden-Face.'

"And my old father did say to her, 'Wild Swan, what is it you pick from the ground?'

"And she did answer him and say, 'Nothing,' for she feared greatly lest he should beat her.

" 'Nothing!' said my old father. 'That is indeed strange. Have I a woman who picks nothing from the ground as easily as I pick something?'

"Then he did kneel down beside her and look carefully upon the ground and he did see the tobacco.

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" 'Ho! Ho!' he said, 'it is nothing then that you smoke,' and he took a stick and beat her till the tepee walls rattled with her roaring. Then he did throw down the stick and as he did go from the tepee he did say to me, 'My little son, whenever you pick something from the ground, be sure that it is something and not nothing, for nothing is but slim feeding and will wear you down more quickly than something on the long trail.'

"And my good mother lay upon the blankets and looked at him, and it seemed to me that there was but little pleasure in her face.

"That night my old father did not come back to the tepee and I said to my good mother, 'Where is my old father that he does not come home to the tepee?'

"My good mother answered and said: 'I can not say, my son. He did go out to see his three bear-traps which are set upon a stream which runs into little Buffalo River.'

"I did say, 'Perhaps, my good mother, a bear has caught my old father?'

"And she answered me and said, 'Would your grief be very heavy, my little son, if a bear did eat your old father?'

"I said, 'Truly, my good mother, I would not be very sorry.' At my reply she did laugh and say, twice, 'My little son, my little son!' And she did hold me in her arms very tightly.

"THE next morning we did rise early from our beds for my good mother said, 'My little son, we will go to your father's bear-traps.' When we did get to the first one we did find my old father caught by one leg, and the leg was broken below the knee where the trap did hold it, and was torn with the great teeth, and it was the only one of the three that had teeth. And the gun of my old father did stand against a hemlock-tree where he had left it.

"When we were come beside him, my old father said: 'Wild Swan,' which was the name my old father always called my good mother, 'all the long night I have stayed here alone, excepting when a gray wolf sat near me until the moon rose over the trees, and the wolf complained in a low voice, bitterly, because I was long in dying. And when it was dark under the trees I could see his eyes, and they were like green fire, and his belly did press against his backbone, because of the emptiness in it.'

"Then said my good mother: 'Last night I did look for the tobacco, but could not find it and I know you have a great store. Tell me where you did hide it.'

" 'It is even as you say, Wild Swan,' my old father replied, 'and if you will look in the hollow root of a great tamarack-tree, which I did blaze upon two sides, you will find much tobacco.'

" 'Where does the tamarack-tree stand?' asked my good mother.

" 'A little to the east of the tepee,' said my old father, 'and it does lean a little to one side like a sick man, and a little above the ground it has become two trees.'

"Then my good mother said to my old father, 'What would you do now, my good man?'

" 'Woman,' he said to her, and I had never before heard him call her 'Woman,' but always 'Wild Swan,' which was the name he always called her by. And he said to her, 'Woman, I would die quickly but I am dying slowly.'

"Then my good mother said to him, 'Is that all that you would have?'

"And my old father said, 'It is a little thing, but it is all,' and he smiled when he had said it. Then he spoke again to her and said, 'Send my little son to me for a word from his old father.'

"My good mother said to me, 'Go to your old father, my little son.'

"So I walked up to him and said, 'What is it, my old father?'

"He took me by the hand and he looked at me a long time and said, 'My little son, Achittimo!' And he drew me to him and he did kiss me on my forehead and say again, 'Achittimo!' Then he did loosen the hold he had of my hand and say, 'Go down the stream a little way, my son, and wait there till your good mother comes to you.' So I did as my old father told me and waited by a great stone.

"In a little time I heard a gunshot. Then again in a little time my good mother came to me, and she was carrying my old father's gun and on her back was the great trap that was about his leg. And the trap was nearly as heavy as a half-sack of flour.

"I said to her, 'What did you shoot at, my good mother?'

"And my good mother answered me and said, 'A cunning magpie flew to a branch above your old father's head, and he did

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call your old father many evil names, so I did shoot him. Now let us walk back to the tepee, my little son.' So we did walk back very quickly, together, and I have never seen my old father since that day."

"It is a good story," said Thelma, "but I thought you would tell me the story of the mad white man?"

"I am coming to that," said Achittimo, and he began again to fill his pipe. When he had charged it a second time from the piece of Yonson's tobacco he put what was left of the plug in his tobacco-bag, and began his story.

CHAPTER XIV

THE STORY WRITTEN IN THE SNOW

"THE canoe of the mad white man lies in the little balsams at the mouth of the stream which is a half-day's journey below Wapoose Lake, and if he had known where my tepee did stand, being so near, there is much that might have been different.

"But surely from what the brother of my wife's aunt told me, the white man must have been mad. Then, too, there is the story of it written upon the snow, and what is written upon the snow is the truth. The wolves are many and cruel this Winter."

" 'The man whose lodge stands by the paths of the rivers in the far-away has knowledge.' " Thelma's reply was a proverb among the Yellowknives.

Achittimo took his pipe from his mouth and looked at her for a moment gravely, and in silence. Then, resting his two hands on his knees, he leaned toward her, his eyes glowing with a dull fire, and when he spoke his voice possessed a thrilling note.

"The wisdom of my tribe is as honey for sweetness on your lips, and as a bird's song," he said.

Thelma rose quickly to her feet and stood before him very straight.

"Achittimo," she said, "is my brother."

Bending forward she touched his forehead with the finger-tips of her right hand. Then she seated herself again, her face flushed, her eyes brilliant. Acting as she had done, swayed by a sudden generous impulse, she could not have paid the man a higher compliment.

It is probable that apart from Thelma's extraordinary beauty and happy spirits, a secret of her popularity among the Indians was her understanding of, and readiness to enter into, their customs and superstitions. The kindness of her heart, her sympathy and her tact constituted her power.

"Heart of a woman!" said Achittimo softly, and was silent for a little while.

Then the Indian continued his story as if there had been no interruption, but into his voice there had crept a feeling, a timbre, that was not there before.

"The white man was sick in the Winter and because of his sickness he did not eat much, and he became weak. And I am wondering often why he did not die.

"Then from far off among the hills nine wolves walked hunting. All day and all night they hunted and they were not tired, but they were thin and their bellies high, and the trail that they made was not deep, a little because of their lightness and a little because the wind did pack the snow.

"And on in front ran always a great bitch wolf, and the dew-claw was off her left hind foot, and the blood of it stained the snow. And often she would sit down and pull the ice off her foot with her teeth, and then she would lick it, for it hurt her. When the bitch wolf sat in the snow the other eight would all sit down, and they would not pass her, for she was great in size and savage as a barren woman.

"Now when the nine wolves were but a short day from the sick white man they did come upon the trail of a cow caribou and her calf. Then they did follow the deer's trail and they did kill her calf, but it was very young and small so that they did eat it quickly and journeyed on in their hunting, and the story I am telling you is true as the birth of a child, for it was written on the snow.

"And the day they traveled by the two-forked stream which is to the north of Wapoose Lake I hunted deer, but found none upon that day, and that was in the December moon. Then upon the day that followed I did again find their trail and they were running not fast, but as wolves run when deer are near at hand, and the spirit tells them.

"Always the great bitch wolf was in front. Once another wolf ran too close to her and she bit at him very fiercely, and did tear the fur from his shoulder and the fur did lie upon the snow, and he did jump sideways and the tracks of his feet were deep in the snow beside the tracks of those that ran with him.

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"And they did not stop in their running till the big *muskeg* was behind them and the hill that lies to the north of it was beneath their feet. Then the nine lay down and pulled away with their teeth the frozen snow which was caked between their toes.

"That night about the time when the Dancing Light* is brightest they did come to the tent of the mad white man. Then they did sit upon the snow, about an easy gunshot from the tent, in the shape of a moon when it is young, each one close to the other, but the old bitch wolf lay down a little apart from the others. And while they were there they did sing their song to the stars. And it is all true, that which I tell you, for it was written in the snow.

"The next night they were closer about the tent, and always side by side they sat, but as before the great bitch wolf lay apart from them. Upon the third night they were near about the tent like dogs, and they no longer sat each beside the other, but moved about, each one going where the spirit in him said, 'Go.' And they did complain bitterly in low voices one to another, as is the way with wolves.

"But always in the tent a fire burned in a small stove, both smoke and many sparks coming from wrapped iron running through the roof. But though the white man was sick he did not fear the wolves, for the spirit in him was big and his heart was as the heart of a bear. And always when the day came, though there is but little difference between the day and the night in our land when the cold Winter is upon us, the nine wolves would walk away among the trees and hunt till the evening, but always they would return to the tent of the mad white man.

"For, as you know, wolves would rather kill a man than a deer. Some say that the meat of a man is sweet beyond the meat of any deer, but that I do not know. But a medicine-man did tell me once, 'To a wolf a man is an evil god, and the song that the wolves sing when they hunt is a song about the wickedness of man.' So when they are together they will always leave deer to hunt a man, for 'the death of a man is as the life of five wolves.' And that is what the medicine-man told me while I did smoke with him in his tepee.

"And the story he told me of how the little owl, who shouts at night, stole the fish from a great bear, I will very gladly tell you, for it is a strange story and as pretty as a song." Achittimo paused and looked at Thelma.

"It is indeed good of you, my brother," Thelma replied, "but first I would hear all that you can tell me of the mad white man."

"I will do even as you wish, Spirit of the Morning," said Achittimo, and continued.

"Now when some days had passed and it was the middle of the December moon, the white man did pack a little sleigh with all that was his. But of food he had but a little, and of meat none at all, only flour and tea, and he laid his rifle on the load. Neither had he snow-shoes, but he thought —and in some way a white man is more foolish than a bird at night when the bush burns—that the snow was packed hard enough to carry him.

"I am thinking that the morning was fine when he started, with much dancing light in the sky. But he was very weak even at the start and the load was heavy upon him, and often he would go through the snow, sometimes to his middle. And the distance he had to walk was a four-days' travel for a strong man."

"Surely the man was mad," said Thelma.

"The truth is ever upon your lips, heart of a maid," said Achittimo.

"THAT night he camped on the river-bank where his canoe was cached, and he walked not straight because of his sickness, but stumbled while he walked. He had much wood, too, to cut, or he would die of the cold. Twice he fell while he chopped, but always he would get to his feet, for his heart was big. Then he went into his tent and made his fire and ate half of a bannock he had cooked the day before.

"All night long the wolves stayed with him, and he could hear the feet of them in the snow beside his tent. Then for two days he walked down the river, dragging his light load and falling often. And through the days, now, the wolves walked with him along the river-bank, while in front, always, the great bitch wolf walked. When the man would fall she would turn and face him, stamping very quickly with her front feet, and she would look at the others and lick her lips and say, 'It is not time.'

"On the morning of the third day the mad white man did leave his tent standing

*Aurora Borealis.

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upon the river-bank, and he did leave his blankets in the tent, for the sickness was very heavy upon him, and he walked down the river pulling his little sleigh. That morning, too, both of his feet became frozen and his left hand. And the cold was so great that the trees cracked with the sound of a gun, and the ice complained.

"Three times in the distance of an easy rifle-shot the man fell. The third time when he did rise to his feet he went to his load and did sit down upon it. And the words I am telling you are true words, for they were written on the snow."

"But surely he could see the wolves, Achittimo?"

"Surely, Thelma, but only like shadows upon the snow, for he was then like a man who is dying, and the reason in him and the sight of his eyes were liars. Then while he did sit upon his load the old bitch wolf did look at the mad white man, and she did turn to the others and say, 'It is time.' Then the nine wolves did trot up to the white man each one beside the other, very easy, in the shape of a moon when it is young. But the great bitch wolf was a little before the others.

"When she reached the sleigh of the mad white man she leaped to the top of the load and she did take the man's coat in her teeth and pull him toward her, and he fell upon his side in the snow. Then the great bitch wolf leaped upon him and caught him by the throat, and she did tear his throat out, as is the way with wolves.

"And so the nine wolves did kill the mad white man upon the ice of Beaver River and the clothes he wore and some of his bones are now all that is left of him upon the ice. And what I have told you is the truth, for it was written on the snow.

"Then the wolves sat down, each one beside the other, in the shape of a moon when it is young, and they did lift their heads and did sing their song to the stars, and to the little trees that stand whispering together upon the river-banks. Then they did leave the river and the woods closed about them and they were gone, as a dream in the morning."

When Achittimo finished his story Thelma was silent for a little time, holding her hands together upon her knees. In her mind she was absent in the great woods, and upon the banks of a river. It was a frozen river, and a man staggered past in the starlight, alone, dragging a load upon the ice, while shadows walked near him, menacing, terrible! Then, on the instant as it were, she returned out of the distance and looked into the face of the Indian.

"There was something more I was thinking, Achittimo?"

"There is the sleigh of the mad white man which I did bring with me, which is yours, and his canoe, by the writing he did make."

"I believe it was as you say." Thelma spoke thoughtfully. "Is there much upon the sleigh, Achittimo?" she asked.

"Not much, but there is his rifle and a piece of blanket made into a little pack, but I am not knowing what is in it."

The Indian rose to his feet. "I will go now and get the sleigh for you," he said.

When Achittimo left the room Thelma remained in it for a little while. She sat still thinking of the story she had been told, and of the fact that she need never more be afraid of the Jack man, the knowledge of whose death was a relief to her mind. She told herself unhesitatingly that she was thankful he was dead. She had feared him greatly—she realized how much now that the danger was past.

The thought of his terrible sufferings at the end appealed but slightly to her sympathy. Thelma, after all, was only a beautiful savage. Thorndice alive had threatened her peace of mind, while Thorndice dead could no longer trouble her, and of course she was thankful. She would not have been able to understand another feeling. She told herself that she only wanted her lover, now, to make her happiness complete.

When Thelma returned to the store she found her father there alone. She at once told him the news that Achittimo had brought. She had hardly finished telling her father before Achittimo was at the door. Thelma told him to bring the sleigh inside. When he had done so he said something about one of his dogs and left hurriedly.

CHAPTER XV

"A MERRY CHRISTMAS!"

EVEN though she was thankful that the Jack man's desperate attempt to come to her had been a failure Thelma would have been less than human if she

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could have looked upon that little roughly made sleigh unstirred at all. In his fierce way, that would have made for her unhappiness, he had cared for her. Thelma, like many wiser women perhaps, was too ready to believe in vehement protestations of love. She recalled to mind his rough wooing of her.

And he was dead now. Perhaps for a few moments the horror of that death touched her. Her father's voice recalled her to the present, dispelling her thoughts of Thorndice. The big Dane was standing beside her.

"Well," he said, "it is yours. What are you going to do with it? It don't look worth much."

He laughed. With his moccasined foot he stirred something in the front portion of the load—something hidden by sacking which gave out the chink of metal.

"Traps, I guess," he remarked, and traps it proved to be. A new .303 Winchester rifle was tied to the top of the load. Yonson remarked, "That is something, anyway," and stood it against the wall. There remained now only the little pack done up in blanket. It was lashed unnecessarily securely to the sleigh, Thelma thought, with wire and light rope. Her father was on his knees struggling with the knots, and muttering his "by yiminies."

"It seems that I am getting Christmas presents after all," said Thelma.

"By yiminy, my dear, I would not gif you one plug of tobacco for this one."

"By yiminy, father, I will not gif it for one plug, but I will gif it for two plugs," Thelma mimicked him.

"Some of these days, my leetle daughter, I will whip you for a Christmas present."

"You will have to catch me first, by yiminy! Now do hurry up, you slow man! The Indians will all be here in a minute."

At length it was untied and the big Dane lifted it from the sleigh, exclaiming at its weight as he did so. He carried it to the counter where he let it fall upon it with a thud, and again remarked upon its weight. As he proceeded to unroll it the first things that came to view were three boxes of .303 rifle-cartridges.

"Ha!" exclaimed the Dane, "ca'tridges! it is no wonder she is heavy."

Thelma exclaimed, "My gracious!" but was disappointed with the contents. Cartridges, to her, were commonplace.

Next they found a pair of hair-brushes and two letters in big official envelopes. One contained the title-deeds to a store and a dwelling-house in Edmonton, made out in the name of John Edward Thorndice. The other letter, addressed to him at Chippewayan, was apparently from his agent in Edmonton informing Thorndice that the writer had rented the store on a three-years' lease at two hundred dollars a month to the firm of "James Brown Limited, retail clothiers."

The letter further stated that the agent thought that there would be no trouble whatever in renting the house, as just such houses were largely in demand. The letter closed with a reference to certain railway shares, and was signed, "C. L. Styner." Yonson read the letter carefully. He turned to look wordlessly at his daughter.

"Well," said Thelma, "what does it all mean?"

"It means," said her father, "that you have at least two hundred dollars a month, an' I guess more too. Gosh de t'ing but you are a lucky girl, by yiminy!"

"What!"

He told her again at greater length, explaining everything to her most carefully. They turned their attention again to the little pack, Thelma in a turmoil of mixed feelings. She told herself that she was a rich girl now, but could not realize it. Next they found a razor, a strap and looking-glass.

"That is like an Englishman," said Yonson, "first of all they must think of their pretty face."

"A good thing, too," said Thelma.

"Humph! that's like a woman."

"What's that?" said Thelma.

It was a second, smaller package, also done up in blanket and very securely tied with strong cord, which had attracted her attention. Her father lifted it up, then exclaimed:

"Thelma, by yiminy, that ees where the weight comes from."

He laid it on the counter again, and, turning round, faced his daughter. They both knew Thorndice had been prospecting for placer. And from what Achittimo had told them they concluded that he had had a measure of success. Yonson had been told by his daughter of the Englishman's certainty as to the richness of his claim.

For a moment they were silent looking

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at one another. Between them on the counter lay the mean little package wrapped in its strip of discolored blanket. It is possible that the same thought was in the mind of each. For in the eyes of Thelma and her father of a sudden there burned excitement like a flame.

"Father, what is it?" Thelma pressed her hands to her temples and looked at him.

"More ca'tridges, I guess." As he spoke he moistened his lips with his tongue, for they had grown strangely dry. He essayed to undo the knots with his fingers, but his fingers shook as with a palsy.

Of a sudden Thelma screamed with laughter.

"Silence, girl!" Her father turned upon her in a gust of anger.

"Oh, oh!" said Thelma. She wrung her hands, twisting them together and by an effort checked a hysterical breakdown.

"Gif me a knife," said Yonson, and held a shaking hand out while he muttered, "These knots, by yiminy!"

Thelma handed him a knife from the little show-case on the counter.

"Lock the door," said her father in a stern, hoarse voice, for excitement in the man was mounting like the fumes of wine.

His daughter did it and began a nervous, rapid pacing up and down the room.

With a single movement Yonson cut the stout cords that bound the package. His daughter came to his side and stood with clinched hands. Her breast fell and rose as quickly as though she had been running, while she breathed as a woman might when sobbing. Her eyes were dry.

The Dane took the loosened edge of blanket which contained the weight and raised his hand. Out upon the counter there rolled heavily—first one, then another and another—nine full round deerskin packages, from six to eight inches long and about an inch and a half in diameter. At sight of them the big Dane leaped into the air, struck his hands together with a slap that rang, and roared with mighty laughter.

"What do they mean?" cried Thelma staring.

HER father turned to her, placed his two hands upon her shoulders and bending forward looked into her face. His own, flushed swarthy red, was working still with laughter. He steadied his voice and spoke to her:

"My leetle girl," he said, "will you now gif dis sleigh-load for two plugs of tobacco?"

"No—no," she shook her head. Her eyes blazed with excitement. "But—father, what does it mean?"

Yonson had turned to the counter again and was putting the little buckskin bags on the scales he used for weighing his goods. For a moment he was silent. Then he turned to her:

"It means, Thelma, dat if dat Eenglish man had come back wit' dis I guess you would haf had to marry him or break your word, an' if you tell a lie I whip you sure!"

"There ain't ten thousand there, I guess?"

"Oh, ain't there?"

"What is it anyway?" asked Thelma.

"You don't know a miner's 'poke,' Thelma, an' you de daughter of a miner? Girl, you make me seek."

"What is it, father? Can't you tell me what it is?" She leaned over the counter and looked into the scales.

"Gold! Thelma, gold!"

"Gold! In them dirty little bags?"

Yonson did not answer her. Perhaps he did not hear her. Those little bags filled tightly with their treasure stirred his blood. He got their weight as closely as he could, and penciled a calculation.

"How much do they weigh?" Thelma inquired.

"Thirty-three pounds and fifteen ounces." Her father straightened and looked at her.

"Land sakes!" said Thelma.

"Or ten thousand eight hundred and sixty dollars!" said the Dane. Thelma clasped her hands. She could not conceive of such a sum at all.

On the instant some one tried the latch of the front door. Then followed an excited knocking and Wahaneetah's voice was heard shouting:

"Thelma! Thelma!"

"Not a word of this to any one," said Yonson sternly.

He took up the "pokes" of gold as he spoke and went into the store-room as his daughter opened the door. Wahaneetah entered, stumbling in her haste.

"A man, a man!" she cried excitedly. "With six dogs in his team! Oh, Thelma, such a man! as straight as a young spruce, and——"

"A man?" said Thelma.

Wahaneetah nodded. "A white man, Thelma! Tall as your father. I never see

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such a man. And pretty, Thelma! I never see such a pretty man in all the big North. He speaks Yellowknife, too, just like us.

"He say 'Happy Christmas.' I laugh like everything. Then I say, too, 'Happy Christmas,' just the same as he says it, just 'Happy Christmas,' like that.

"Then he laugh, 'Ha, ha.' But what's the matter with you, anyway? You sick, Thelma?"

For Thelma had clutched her dress and swayed before her. Her face was chalk-white.

There came the sudden sound of another hand upon the latch. The door was pushed open and a tall man entered. At the same moment Yonson, too, returned and took up his position behind the counter.

"It's him! it's him!" Wahaneetah whispered excitedly.

But Thelma did not notice the half-breed at all just then. She was looking at the white man. Something in his bold, free carriage and the dancing lightness of his step roused recollections that had tortured her with sweetness. Meanwhile her father stood behind his counter, leaning on it, waiting.

The stranger's face was still muffled as it had been out-of-doors. He strode across the room up to the big Dane, not noticing the girls. And then he laughed.

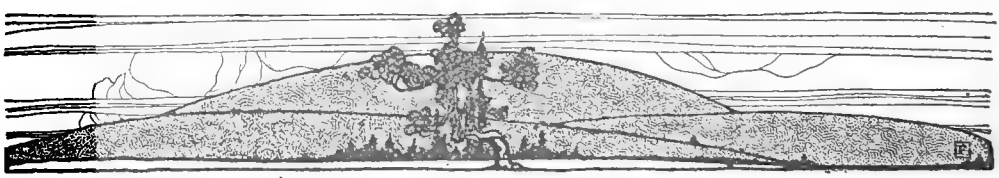
Thelma pressed a hand upon her breast and whispered, "God!"

The tall stranger pulled off his fur cap and brought it down, with his fist inside of it, upon the counter. Thrusting out his free right hand, he said:

"A merry Christmas, Mr. Yonson!"

Thelma wrung her hands with a strange vehemence. She stepped quickly from Wahaneetah's side to the middle of the room, and held out her hands and raised her head very straight, and the lamplight shone in her eyes and there was a glory in her eyes, and in a voice that trembled with the tender feeling in it, she said—

"Rupert—a merry Christmas, Rupert!"



TWO MEN

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

HIS face was massive in its strength, and burnt the hue of brick;
His arms resembled bands of steel, his neck was corded thick;
And as he swaggered down the street the men would turn and say,
"That chap must be a scrapper! See him get the right of way!"
(But at the brewery he was known as "Kelly, 2B dray.")

His clothes were new and freshly pressed, he wore a single glass;
He seemed to strike an attitude as every girl would pass;
While, as he swung his little cane, the people turned to stare
And say, "What fops we meet! Just see that fellow's mincing air!"
(But in the South Sea ports they called him "Hellcat Billy" Clare!)

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TIM SULLIVAN DESERTER

By W. Townend

PRIVATE SULLIVAN pushed open the door of the white-washed barrack-room and stood on the threshold staring about him with a puzzled frown. For a moment or two he hesitated, then, carrying his head very erect and his shoulders squared, after the manner of the parade-ground, he swaggered the length of the room and sank down heavily on his iron bed-cot.

A man seated on the next bed looked up from the newspaper he was reading, saw Private Sullivan's flushed face and glazed eyes and swore.

"You're a fool, Tim Sullivan! You've been dhrinkin' again! An' you just out afther a hundhred an' sixty-eight hours cells for dhrunk an' resistin' the escort! Have ye no sinse at all?"

"Mind yer own business, O'Reilly!" said Private Sullivan. "You'll shpake a worrd too much one o' these days, an' you an' me will have a fallin' out! Dhrinkin'! Yis. I would be in the cantheen this minute had I the money. An' who's to sthop me? Not you, Mr. O'Reilly, so lave me alone!"

O'Reilly grunted and turned once more to his paper, while Private Sullivan rested his head in his hands and brooded over his troubles.

The main cause of Private Sullivan's gloom, however, was not the memory of the one hundred and sixty-eight hours that he had spent in cells, nor the fine which he had had to pay, nor what the Colonel had said in the orderly-room, but a letter from his home in Dublin, the first that had reached him since he had joined the army.

That this letter came, not from one of his own family, but from an outsider, rankled. What right had she to interfere? Private Sullivan's lip curled.

A corporal entered the room, glanced at Private Sullivan and crossed over to his own bed in a corner by the fireplace.

Private Sullivan leant back against his rolled-up mattress and began to read the letter once more.

"Why had he not written for two whole years? Why had he never told them the name of his regiment? Why had he been so cruel? Had he no pity? What reasons had he for deliberately cutting himself off from everybody?"

Here Private Sullivan gave a short, hard laugh.

He must come home at once and see his mother. She had been ill, and now, when she should be getting better, she did be sinking each day. Not from the illness, but because she was breaking her heart for him.

It was near three years since he had enlisted. Was he to let stubbornness stand in the way of saving his mother's life? For as sure as the sun was setting behind the Wicklow Hills she would die did she not see him again and learn from his own lips that he was well. She had no wish to live. She cared for nothing at all any more.

The letter ended by saying that the writer had not mentioned a word to any one, but had written, having heard of him through a friend whose brother——

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PRIVATE SULLIVAN raised his eyes from the letter.

"Corp'ral Brady!" he said.

"Well, what is it now?" said the corporal and strolled across the room, buckling on his belt.

"You're afther talkin' about me in yer letthers home, are you, Corp'ral Brady?" said Private Sullivan, eying the other man's scarlet tunic gloomily. "What have ye been saying, eh? I'm always in throuble, am I? A disgrace to the reg'mint, eh? Up before the Colonel for bein' dhrunk, is it? Divil take you, have ye no more to do with yer time than to be carryin' tales?"

"Ye've no call to be sayin' thim things," said Corporal Brady. "Why should I be botherin' to write what I think of the likes of you? I said you were in the Batthalion, an' not a worrd more. Do ye think I'd be bringing discredit on the reg'mint by shpakin' the truth an' sayin' what ye are?"

Private Sullivan realized dimly that some insult was intended.

"The thruth!" said he, trying to gather his wits. "What do ye mane by that, Corp'ral Brady?"

"Look at yerself now the way ye are! Look in the glass! You're dhrunk this prisint minute. You're no good, Tim Sullivan, an' niver will be. A fine soldier, are ye not?"

The liquor was working in Private Sullivan's brain. He rose to his feet and clenched his fists.

"Ye lie, Brady! I will allow no man, corp'ral or no corp'ral, to shpake to me that ways."

O'Reilly stretched out a huge hand and grabbed him by the elbow.

"Set down, an' don't be makin' a show of yersel'!"

Private Sullivan shook him off. His face was pale and his dark hollow-set eyes glittered.

"I'm a betther soldier than you are, Brady, an' you know it! You've had a down on me since the first day I joined the reg'mint. Have I iver been dirty on p'rade? Do you see the crossed rifles on me shleeve? What do they sthand for? Have you iver seen the sign o' dhrink on me on duty? Am I not the best dhrill in the comp'ny? Has the adjutant not chosen me time an' time agin as ord'ly of the day? Corp'ral or no corp'ral, ye'll ate yer worrds yit, you sniveling Orangeman, if I have to ——"

"That will do!" said Brady, flicking his leg with his swagger-stick. "You have said more than enough. You will larn some day, Sullivan, that insolence to an N. C. O. is the one thing that will not be passed over. I have thried to help you, but you may go yer own ways now till the day comes whin they discharge you as incorrigible an' worthless, an' be —— to ye!"

He walked slowly away and Private Sullivan seated himself on his bed, laughing.

"Ye've done it now," said O'Reilly. "Why did you sthart arguin'? A good little man is Jack Brady, if you thrate him right. But he'll land you before the Colonel now, sure as eggs, an'—bad scran to ye!—I will be detailed as a witness ag'in' ye. Arrah! Why could ye not keep yer silly tongue quiet?"

But Private Sullivan was reading his letter once more, and heard nothing.

His mother was breaking her heart because of him. Why? Private Sullivan was puzzled. Why should he have to go home? She had the others near at hand. What difference could he make? But suppose his mother did die! Would he be responsible? Suppose——

His mind wandered, and he heard Private O'Reilly speaking to him.

"You'll be in the ord'ly-room to-morra, Tim, an' you'll know what to ixpect. Fourteen days in the jug an' siven days C. B. on top; or mebbe a coort martial, as ye've been on the carpet before on the same charge."

"What's that?" Private Sullivan scowled. "Fourteen days!"

"More than that, prob'ly. An' it's yer own fault. Ye've no one to blame but yersel'. Brady did ye no harrm, an' yit——"

"Git out of my sight, O'Reilly, or I'll be timpted to lay hands on ye!"

"I would not sthop near ye if ye paid me," retorted O'Reilly, getting up. "You're a dhrunken *soor*, Tim Sullivan, an' that's the thruth!"

Private O'Reilly flung out of the room, and once more Private Sullivan rested his head in his hands and brooded.

His mother was breaking her heart because of him, was she? She was like to die if she did not see him soon? And he sitting there doing nothing when he should be

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saving her life! Was it much to ask of a man?

II

AT HALF-PAST nine that night at tattoo roll-call, when the orderly-sergeant called Private Sullivan's name, there was no answer.

"Where's Sullivan?" said the sergeant, halting by his bed. "Any one know where that young skrimshanker's got to?"

But nobody knew where Sullivan was, and with good reason, for somewhat earlier in the evening Private Sullivan had slipped out of the barracks and was at that moment making his way toward Dublin, a distance of one hundred and ten miles.

Private Sullivan had only one idea in his head when he deserted, and that to reach home as quickly as possible. There must be no delays, no loitering, and as travel by rail was out of the question, he walked.

Not until he had been on the road an hour or more did he remember that he was wearing his drab khaki uniform and that, if he would avoid arrest by the first constabularyman he met, he must find other and less conspicuous garments.

Private Sullivan was lucky. As he trudged along in the moonlight he came on a man stretched by the roadside snoring drunkenly.

Private Sullivan inspected the sleeper with grave consideration. Then, stooping down, he raised him to a sitting position and unbuttoned his jacket.

When Private Sullivan continued on his way, a few minutes later, he was dressed in a loose tweed jacket with a red worsted muffler and a soft felt hat. The man on the grass wore the khaki jacket and forage-cap of a private in a regiment of the line.

ON A FINE, clear morning, thirty-seven hours after he had deserted, Private Sullivan entered Dublin.

Foot-sore and tired, aching in each limb, half-dead from want of food and sleep, he crawled into the city from Naas by way of Clondalkin, along the Kilmainham Road to King's Bridge.

He paid no heed to the clanging of the tram-cars or the clatter of horses' hoofs. He moved like a man bowed down by some heavy burden, slowly and clumsily, seeing and hearing nothing.

And then as he crossed the Liffey, the old familiar sound of music roused him. He looked up and saw a regiment approaching from the Royal Barracks.

Private Sullivan watched through half-closed eyes the khaki of the soldiers' uniforms and the glitter of the sunshine on the brass instruments of the band.

The throbbing and thunder of the drums and the tramp of heavy boots sent the blood rushing to his head. He forgot in that instant everything: his shame, his weariness and fatigue, the agony of his bruised feet, the reason that had brought him to Dublin, and he stood to attention with a smile on his lips.

The colonel of the regiment rode by and Private Sullivan saluted smartly, a trifle too smartly, for the upward fling of the hand and the set of the shoulders caught the eye of a sharp-featured man in a blue suit.

The regiment, rank after rank of sturdy, smooth-cheeked country-lads, passed on toward the park-gates. The music grew fainter, the murmur of the drums died away in the distance, and Private Sullivan realized of a sudden that he was staring across an empty street at the buildings opposite.

He turned and shuffled off, followed by the man in the blue suit.

As Private Sullivan drew near his home, he was overtaken by a great fear that clung to him and would not be thrown aside. What, if after all his efforts, he should be too late? What if he should find that Death had arrived before him? He tried to quicken his pace and failed. His breath came in deep sobs, his legs began to give way under the weight of his body. He wanted to lie down and sleep, and nothing else mattered.

"Hullo, Tim Sullivan! Where are ye off to?"

Private Sullivan stopped, swayed helplessly and clutched at an iron railing.

"What is it?" he said thickly. "What's it all about?"

Through a mist he saw two men staring at him: a sharp-featured man in a blue suit and a big metropolitan policeman.

"That's what we want to know, Tim Sullivan," said the sharp-featured man. "Why are ye not with your reg'mint?"

"Mother of Hivin!" muttered Private Sullivan. "It's a G. man!"

The plainclothesman nodded and Private Sullivan let go of the railing and would

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have fallen had not strong arms supported him.

"Is it far?" asked Private Sullivan. "For I am near dead, bhoys."

AT THE police-station Private Sullivan dozed as he answered the questions that were put to him by far-away voices.

Only one thing troubled his mind.

"How did ye find me out?" he asked.

"You saluted," said the plainclothesman, "an' that made me look, an' then I recognized you, Tim. Do you not remember me? An' even had I not known you, are ye not wearin' yer khaki trousers an' ammunition boots?"

"How did ye git here, Sullivan?" said the inspector, gazing at the boy's drawn face.

"Walked," said Private Sullivan, closing his eyes. "Foot-slogged every step o' the way, an' all for no raison. I should have been here sooner but that I was afther sleeping three hours longer than I should have done."

"Holy Saints!" said the inspector. "Walked is it, from Tipperary to Dublin, over a hundhred an' tin miles in a day an' a half!"

And after that everything became very indistinct and Private Sullivan went to sleep and slept for a long, long time.

Next morning he was brought up before a magistrate, identified as a deserter and ordered to be detained in custody to await the arrival of an escort from his regiment.

"Plaze God they fetch me soon!" he whispered as he stepped out of the dock. "I've a pain in me shest an' me head's batin' like the dhrums in the 'Dead' March."

"They'll be here to-morra," said a policeman, "unliss mebbe they git their directions mixed up, which bein' militarry 'tis most probable they will."

IN THE twenty-four hours that followed, Private Sullivan suffered a good deal of pain, both in mind and in body. He wondered if an account of his capture had appeared in the *Irish Times* or the *Freeman*, and if so, whether any of those who knew him had read the news.

Each time footsteps passed down the stone corridor he shivered and turned his back on the iron door. But no one came near him all day, and as evening drew on his fears lessened. He spent the night staring into the blackness, unable to sleep, almost stifled for want of air. Dawn found him pacing up and down his small cell.

Early in the afternoon Private Sullivan heard that his escort had arrived, and was led out to meet Corporal Brady and Private O'Reilly. The three soldiers eyed each other in silence.

"That's the fella," said Corporal Brady gruffly.

"They sint you, did they?" said Private Sullivan.

"They did," said Corporal Brady. "But let's have no throuble on that account."

He gave a receipt for the body of his prisoner and Private Sullivan was delivered into his charge.

"May I shpeak a worrd to ye, corp'ral?" asked Private Sullivan wearily.

"What is it?" said Brady, looking him up and down scornfully. "Here, O'Reilly, take howld of my rifle till I fasten these on his wrists."

"Handcuffs, eh!" said Private Sullivan in a listless tone. "I am to go through the streets of Dublin like this, is it? Well, let be. I'm sick enough as it is. But it's all in the siven. May I shpeak to ye, corp'ral?"

"Ye may, but the liss conversation we have, the betther plazed will I be. Save yer breath for yer coort martial."

Private Sullivan laughed.

"I am a prisoner bekase I desarted, am I not? But, Corp'ral Brady, an' you, O'Reilly, why did I desart? Answer me that now!"

"Bekase you were afraid of what would happen to ye afther you shpakin' to me the way you did. I did not report ye as I should have done, Sullivan, but some day you an' me will settle that matther with our bare fists, and thin I will thrash you till ye can neither see nor shtand."

"An' welcome! But, would I desart for what ye say? Afraid! No. I am no coward, Corp'ral Brady. O'Reilly, *you* know that! Listen! She is sick, dyin'. Me mother is sick. I had a letther that day sayin' she would die did she not see me. Was I to wait in barracks knowin' that she was sinkin' to the grave bekase of me? I'm afther thrampin' all these weary miles across Ireland for the same raison, an' that's the thruth! Brady, I'm half dead

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with sufferin'. Must I go back to the reg'mint without seein' her? An' it was at the very door that they tuk me. Will ye not let me go to her?"

"No," said the corporal flatly. "I will not. Is it likely I'd be lettin' ye go wandherin' all over the city out to Clontarf or Kingstown or Malahide mebbe? To come back at yer laysure or not as you plazed? You must think me a fool!"

"Hivin help ye, Brady! Have ye no pity? Me mother is dyin'! Here. In this very town. Am I to be taken back to sarve four months, perhaps, in the jug without so much as a glimpse of her? Is it axin' too much of ye, Corp'ral Brady?"

"Why did ye not ax the polis? You had two days——"

"The polis! Would they have let me? They would not, as you know. Have some pity! Come with me to the house, man, to the very door of the room where she do be. Let me see her for five minutes. Is it too much for ye, Corp'ral Brady, to save a dyin' woman? Think of yer own mother! If she was dyin', an' you——"

"—— you, Sullivan!" broke in Corporal Brady in a low voice, "have I anny raison to do you a sarvice? God knows I have not. Since the day I was given my shtripes you have made throuble an' mischief."

He paused for a moment and then continued with fierce anger, cursing himself for his weakness: "Will ye give me yer worrd of honor not to thry an' escape?"

A lump rose to Private Sullivan's throat.

"I will. I swear by the saints an'——"

"Yer worrd is sufficient. I want none of yer Popish saints," said the Orangeman, turning. "The darbies you must wear lest we be seen."

"Which way do we go, Tim?" asked Private O'Reilly as they reached the street.

"It will be shorter," said Private Sullivan hiding his hands under the loose ends of his worsted muffler, "if we walk up——"

"We will not walk," said Corporal Brady. "We will take a side-car."

He raised his hand and beckoned.

III

A FEW minutes later they drove down a quiet side street. Private Sullivan touched the corporal on the arm.

"That's the house yonder with the black cat on the winda-sill."

"The one with the white curtains? All right." The corporal spoke to the driver. "Dhrive a little beyant, Pat, an' pull up. Thin wait till we thransact some business. This'll do."

Private Sullivan knocked with his manacled hands at the door. A small boy walked along the pavement and halted, his eyes bulging with astonishment and expectation. Private O'Reilly leaned on his rifle and whistled softly. The corporal frowned.

"Hurry up!" he said. "We've none too much time to be loitherin' around here."

Private Sullivan knocked once more and they heard light footsteps approaching.

The door opened and a girl with a pale face and dark brown hair stood before them.

"Who is it?"

"Bess!" said Private Sullivan, turning a dusky red. "Do you not know me? Am I come in time?"

The girl stared at him and then at the two men in uniform.

"You!" she said, and her blue eyes flashed anger. "You! What might *you* be doin' here, Mr. Soldier, like this, an' she dyin' up-stairs, breakin' her heart for a sight of ye?"

"Why are you here, Bess?" asked Private Sullivan listlessly, lowering his hands.

"Who is there to see afther things if I do not come in an' help whin the others do be worrkin'? Is it millionaires you are, all of a sudden? An' why have you come like this, in thim clothes? An' who are these with ye?" She stopped short and then for the first time she saw the steel handcuffs. "Blissed Hivin! What is the manin' of it all?"

"Do you not understand, Bess? I was in throuble, so—I desarted an' was taken prisoner. But I thried to git here, Bess. This is the escort that's afther comin' to fetch me back. The corp'ral has given me lave to—to see her. Let me in!"

A small crowd had gathered on the sidewalk and was watching with silent curiosity the two soldiers and the tall young man in the shabby clothes.

"Let you in!" said the girl, the color creeping into her cheeks. "I will do no such thing. *You!* Do ye think I would let you in, wearin' thim things? To kill her dead?"

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"We'll be takin' the handcuffs off," said Corporal Brady. "Let us in, plaze! It does be too crowded out here."

"A desarter from the arrmy!" said the girl bitterly, and Private Sullivan shivered at the cold scorn in her voice. "A desarter! Keep out, Mr. Tim Sullivan, you an' yer jailers, an' let her die in pace. She has faith in you shtill."

Then the girl broke down and began to cry.

"Tim, how could ye? There was some hope before, but now—now it is all gone. We thought you were doin' so fine an' now ——"

"Git inside," said the corporal suddenly. "We can't be standing here with all thim people lookin'."

They entered a narrow passage and closed the door.

"Not here," whispered the girl. "She will hear you."

She led the way into the small front sitting-room.

The corporal rested his rifle against the table and unlocked the handcuffs.

"Now," he said under his breath, "be off with ye, Sullivan, an' make haste. We have no time to spare."

But the girl clutched fiercely at Private Sullivan's arm.

"You can not," she sobbed. "It would be too cruel! Do ye not undherstand, Tim Sullivan? It would be too cruel!"

"Cruel!" said the man dully. "Have I thraveled all this way from Tipperary for nothing, thin? You say she is dyin'! The coort martial will sind me to prison for four months, perhaps, an' thin—afther the four months, will she be livin', Bess?"

"H'sh!" said the girl. "Do not shpake so loud! She thinks—from the things ye said in thim letthers two years ago that you are doin' fine. Are ye to bhreak her heart by goin' to her in thim clothes? Look at yerself, the figure you are! She belaives in ye, Tim. Only lasht week she was afther tellin' me you would be a corp'ral by now, if not a sergeant. Is she to see you as you are, a desarter? No, Tim, you must be brave an' go."

Private Sullivan bowed his head. "You're right, Bess, you're right."

He turned to the corporal and held out his hands.

"On with thim ag'in, corp'ral, an' let's go! There's raison in what the gerrl ses. It would be shame enough for her to see me as a private in the line without a good-conduct badge on me sleeve, but as a desarter, in these clothes—God help us, no! It's a blundherin' ijyut I am to be thinkin' of it!"

Being an Irishman, the corporal had a warm heart and imagination in plenty, but he was also a British soldier, and consequently, like all good British soldiers, he lacked initiative.

On the word of a nineteen-year old subaltern fresh from Sandhurst he would have charged single-handed on a battery of quick-firers. Yet the very thought of acting without orders from a superior paralyzed him.

He glanced in a helpless way at his prisoner, then at O'Reilly, who made a pretense of examining a china dog on the mantelpiece, and then at the girl who stood with her back to the door.

Something in her face touched him, and for the second time within one short hour Corporal Brady surrendered weakly, against his better judgment.

"Wait! Don't be in such a tearin' hurry, Sullivan! I said you would see yer mother, an' see her you shall. You will be the corp'ral!"

He was unbuckling his belt as he spoke.

The girl gave him a shy little smile, but Private Sullivan thrust out his hands once more. The corporal grabbed him by the arm and shook him.

"Wake up! Off with yer jacket! There is no need for me to unwind my puttees. Undherstand! You have yer khaki trousers, ye fool, an' the jacket is all that ye'll need. You are to wear the sthripes!"

Then did Private Sullivan understand. A lump rose to his throat and his eyes dimmed.

"Brady," he said hoarsely, "I dunno' why in the worrld you ——"

"Shut yer gab!" retorted the corporal. "I'll give ye tin minutes, Sullivan, an' no more. Yes, belt, bandolier, cap, everything. Put thim on. Here, an' take the rifle."

"Mother of Hivin! What am I to say to her?" said Private Sullivan as he stepped out into the hall. "How shall I——"

"Can ye not lie?" said the girl with a gust of passion. "You have done so before, at laste."

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CLUTCHING the rifle in one hand and the forage-cap in the other, Private Sullivan followed her up the stairs.

"Don't lave us, Bess," he said. "I can not face it alone."

The girl opened a bedroom door and Private Sullivan halted, almost suffocated by the thumping of his heart.

"Is that you, Bess?" said a faint voice. "I'm afther dhramin' that——"

The girl did not speak.

"Is there any one there, Bess? Bess, is there any one on the landin'?"

"It's me, mother," said Private Sullivan. "I am come home to ye."

Wrapped in blankets and seated in a big armchair in front of the fire was a frail, worn-out woman with sad eyes and a tender, drooping mouth. She gave a little choking cry as the soldier stood by her side.

"Oh! Tim, Tim!"

"Mother," said the soldier softly; "I'm sorry."

The years slipped away from him and he was a child once more, asking to be pitied and comforted.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mane it."

He knelt down and she put her arms around him and kissed him.

"Tim, darlin', I knew you'd come. I've been prayin' that I might see ye before I died. An'—thank God—me prayers are answered. I knew I should see ye, Tim. An' you a grown man, Tim, a grown-up man! Big an' sthrong: my little, little bhoy!"

She crooned over him and stroked his hair.

"Mother," said the soldier raising his head and looking up into the sorrowful, happy face that was so like his own and yet so different, "mother, if I'd only known! God forgive me for thratin' you as I have done!"

"Ah! don't, Tim," said the woman. "It hurts." And, motherlike, she took the blame as hers. "It hurts, Tim, to hear you talkin' like that. I thwarted you, Tim, always. It was my fault. Only mine, dear. An', Tim, I should have thried to find ye, but I was sthubborn. An' while I was ill I did be having fancies that all was not well with ye an' that you were in throuble. I should have known betther."

Private Sullivan listened to the happiness in her voice and shivered.

"Throuble is it! Why, no. Will ye forgive me, mother, for what I have done?"

"Don't, dear, plaze! There should be no talk of forgiveness between mother an' son. I'm proud of ye, Tim. Do I not see the corp'ral's sthripes on yer sleeve? So sthrong an' big, an' yit—just my little, little bhoy, afther all. Have ye been sick, Tim? Yer cheeks are all sunken an'——"

The girl standing at the window choked down a sob and the tears came into her eyes once more. She stared at the houses across the street and the gray sky above the yellow chimney-pots and a postman talking to a girl and a milk-cart rattling by.

The ticking of a clock on the bureau mingled with the low murmur of the voices. Minutes passed and her ears caught the sound of uneasy footsteps in the hall beneath.

She turned from the window and looked at the soldier.

"An' why are ye here like this, Tim?" said the mother. "With yer rifle an' belts an' sthraps! You will be shtayin' with us, Tim, will ye not?"

There was a moment's silence. The girl raised her hand to her chin and waited while the clock ticked and the fire spluttered.

"Mother, I am here on duty," said Private Sullivan at last. "In Dublin, on duty. Be brave! mother; but I can not shtop. I must be off this minute, mother, to catch me thrain. This is the one chance I have had—to see ye, an' say I was sorry. Mother, dear, listen! I was sint with a private to fetch back a desarter."

"A desarter!" said the woman softly. "An' you're takin' him back to jail! Where is he, Tim?"

"He is waitin' down-stairs. I am responsible for him, mother, an' I can not sthay."

"Can ye not, Tim? Can ye not shpare one day? Just one! Ah! What am I afther sayin'? I know that ye can not or ye would. I should not be axin' you." She paused and touched his corporal's stripes timidly. "But, Tim, my heart does be achin' for that poor lad that you are takin' back to jail."

"No poor lad at all!" said Private Sullivan wearily. "The black shame of the reg'mint! A dhrunken defaulter, a fighter, a coward, a low, mischief-makin' blagyard! Ye need feel no pity for the likes of him, mother."

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"Hush! Tim, do you know has he a mother? Poor sowl! God give her sthrength to bear her sorrow! Think what it must mane to lose faith in a son! Tim," she kissed him on both cheeks—"Tim, it's a proud an' happy woman I am this day. I have seen ye with my own eyes. My prayers are answered. An', Tim, will ye be back soon?"

Private Sullivan stood up and grasped his cap and rifle.

"In four months from now, mother, plaze God, I will be home on furlough. Mebbe in liss than four months, if I—if I can. But, mother, you must be up an' about by thin. You will, will ye not?" He stooped and kissed her. "Good-by, mother. Ah! don't be cryin'. Four months an' I will be home ag'in."

The girl followed him out of the room and closed the door.

"Bess," he said. "Did I do well?"

"Ye did, Tim. I'm thinkin' you're afther savin' her life. Did ye not see the change in her?"

"Are ye niver comin'?" said a voice from the foot of the stairs.

"Bess," said Private Sullivan, "three years ago I did not know what I know at this prisent minute. Is there no hope?"

She looked at him with her head thrown back and her cheeks pink.

"I have seen ye this day at yer worrst, Tim Sullivan, an' yer best. Go take yer punishment like a man, an' thin—thin, mebbe, Tim, there will be some talk of hoping."

"Sullivan," said the corporal, appearing at the bend of the stairs, "what's come to ye, delayin' this way? Do ye not remimber we have a thrain to catch at King's Bridge?"

A SLIGHT drizzle began to fall as Private Sullivan drove through the streets of Dublin toward the station. He wore steel handcuffs and tattered, dirty garments. People pointed and jeered at him. He was a deserter, a disgrace to his regiment, guarded by an armed escort. He felt tired and sleepy and sick. He would be tried by court martial and be sentenced to prison. And yet—here is the miracle—no man in the City of Dublin that day could have been happier than was Private Sullivan.

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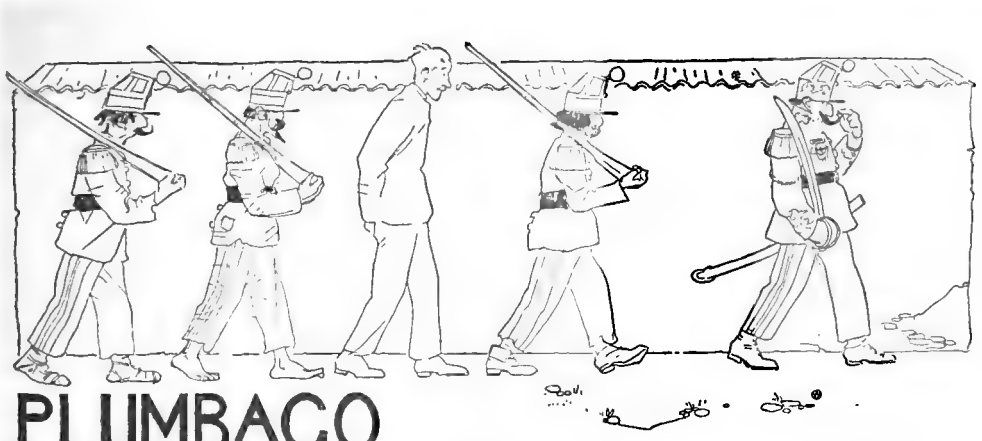

PLUMBAGO, BENEFACTOR of MANKIND

By Ledward Rawlinson

TO THE weary, strife-worn banker burdened with the cares of wealth, and the overworked, underpaid clerk striving to pay off the mortgage on the pianola or the instalments on the baby-carriage, Putnam Farms, situate in the heart of the romantic, ever-Summer land of Florida, offers a port from life's contentions such as may nowhere else be found."

Thus ran the orange-bordered, deckle-edged, two-thousand-dollars-to-the-acre advertising literature of that genial gentleman-adventurer P. Cruiser Putnam, and inasmuch as you couldn't farm on his lands because of the fish, or homeward plod your weary way without a rowboat, the word "port" was appropriate indeed.

Nevertheless Cruiser did a very encouraging business in the Big City until one day a little cold-eyed, bald-headed man with glasses entered the palatial office of the Putnam Land Company and asked for the manager. Instinct and experience told Cruiser that the stranger was a post-office inspector, so in a manner most deferential he requested him to take a seat and wait a second. While the waiting was in progress, the land-agent hurriedly emptied the safe of currency, left a roll of cigar-coupons behind to meet the pay-roll at the end of the week, and climbed through the window on to the fire-escape.

By this romantic route he hied himself away to the impenetrable forests that cover the mountain fastnesses of some of the real-estate developments of the province of New Jersey, and there in the bosom of Nature he remained in a glorious state of vinous exaltation till the hue and cry was over. Whereupon he slipped quietly down to the peace-loving republics of Central-America-by-the-Sea.

Cruiser was a medium-sized, gray-haired man of forty, with a broad, humorous countenance and a bright blue eye. Light-hearted and gay, care-free as a congressman, the big round world was his playground. You might see him running a faro layout in Punta Arenas one day and discover him counterfeiting Mexican dollars up some blind alley in Pekin the next. Sometimes he drank too much and wrecked everything in his path, but only on national holidays and the more important anniversaries.

ON THE steamer he met a tropical tramp by the name of Nick Nagel, a long, lean, chill-and-fever Texan, late of the Legal Tender, Tucson, and as their objects in life chanced to be the same, *i. e.* to educate the common people against putting their surplus coinage into Government bonds or post-office saving-banks, they became close friends and good customers of the ship's bartender.

In the fulness of time they landed one day at noon in the low-lying, plague-infested

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port of Santa Rita, a little sun-scorched hole that lies thirty miles up the Pocos River. After waking the proprietor-manager-bell-boy of the Hotel Madrid from his noisy siesta, the two secured accommodations and went at once to their high-ceilinged, straw-matted room, where they changed into clean white clothes.

"*Compañero,*" said Cruiser as he sank into a creaky rocking-chair, "I suppose we're up against the everlasting proposition of money."

"You're right," answered Nick. "We've got to get busy. Poor laborers in the vineyard like you and me get no time to devote our attention to literature or art or scandal or philanthropy. We have to burn up all our tissue figuring out schemes for relieving passers-by of their monetary excessage. I suppose there's nothing doing in the rich widow or handsome orphan line."

"You might marry President Plumbago's daughter," suggested Cruiser.

"Who is the said Plumbago, and how is he berated in the local Bradstreet?" queried Nagel.

"PLUMBAGO lives in the White-Washed House at Naranjo," said Cruiser, blowing out a mouthful of smoke, "and he's rich enough to belong to Pittsburgh or pay off the national debt of Patagonia. His daughter is the sole heiress to several millions in cash, not to notice a lot of subsidiary collateral in the way of tobacco-plantations, coconut-forests, pine-apple-orchards, banana-groves, and other commercial trysting-places. Her name's Blanca, but they call her Sootina for short. They say she's so homely she puts smoked glasses on before she looks at herself in the mirror. If her face was her fortune she'd be in the Mills Hotel instead of the Palace.

"Old man Plumbago's committed every crime on the calendar from petty larceny to petty perjury to get her married, but without success. He's getting to his Indian Summer now and wants to see her happily wedded so he can devote more time to revolutions and 1860 brandy. Sootina's been raffled, lotteried, offered as a prize for regular attendance at church and as a bonus with Government bonds, yet not a two-legged man of any nationality will bite. She's personally and clandestinely proposed to about half a thousand men both when they were sober and when they were under the influence of fermented juices. She's sang them *canciones de amor* and resorted to every known artifice of woman to get a lawful husband—music, moonlight, palm-trees, laces, velvets, *décolletée*, banquets, billie-doos and blackmail, but not a mother's son, grandson or nephew will take a chance. Gringos by the score have nibbled around at one time and another, but they all 'passed' in the end. Now to a man like you, looking for an ideal independence for his old age——"

Nick got upon his feet and with a yawn stretched out his arms.

"I've got a wife in Guaymas and another in San Antone," said he. "Marry the girl yourself just for fun."

"I'm the seventh son of a seventh son," replied Cruiser, "and I'd rather spend six months in an open boat or in an eight-dollar furnished flat than get married to one of these chicory-colored Amazonettes. Neither love, nor money, nor sympathy, nor shotguns could induce me to marry a native. If I can't get one of my own fellow-countrywomen to make her habitat in my house, then I'll remain a benedict. In the meantime, let's go down-stairs, and under the magic charm of a few glasses of ice-cold Pilsener, see if we can't foment some less romantic way of looting the treasury of this verdant pasture they call a republic."

So to the *cantina* they went. But the beer and the wine and every other liquid in stock were hot and muggy and undrinkable.

"Ice?" asked the swarthy bartender in surprise. "I have never seen any. But would it not make everything cold, señor?"

Cruiser turned his back on the bar.

"It's too hot to murder the man or even maltreat him," said he in despair, "but if ever homicide was justifiable this is it. Let's get out. I don't like to look at such an uninstructed, illiterate savage, intended by nature for a shoeblack, masquerading as a drink-salesman. It makes my eyes ache. *Vamonos.*"

Cursing amiably, they strolled out to the street, but the town was plunged in heat and silence. Save for a few half-naked natives and mangy dogs lolling about in various stages of somnolence, there was no sign of activity of any description. The place seemed to be in the last stage of sleeping-sickness. Lizards crawled unmolested over the sidewalks.

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"Cruiser," said Nick after they had walked as far as the glittering white plaza, "Naranjo is about as lively as Coney Island on Christmas Day, but you can't blame the poor aborigine-natives. A race of people that has to live in a perpetual Turkish bath without any of the discomforts and dangers of civilization is to be pitied. I don't suppose they ever die of those respectable, long-established diseases that do business in other places, but just slowly broil alive like a country-sausage. Here's this beautiful country full of starred and striped parrots, buzzards, hard-shell armadillos, monkeys, iguanas and palm-trees, all as undeveloped and primeval as it was when Robinson Crusoe was writing his adventures for the old-fashioned monthlies.

"Why? Because the natives have no energy. Why have they no energy? Because their blood's all overheated and sluggish through drinking hot, insipid liquors instead of ice-cold drinks that put ambition in a man's heart and colic in his stomach. Ice has been the forerunner of civilization since the world was made. How could Washington have crossed the Delaware for a little week-end of diversion and damage in Trenton if it hadn't been for the ice in the river? How could Napoleon have retreated from Moscow without ice? And to come back to our own time and place, how could Peary have got to the North Pole without it? It's the one thing in the world next to intoxicating fluids and tobacco and poker and horse-racing and vaudeville that's absolutely indispensable."

CRUISER took the butt of his cigar from his mouth and tossed it away.

"Your opening chorus is far too long," he said sharply. "For the love of Skagway Joe's tormented soul, get down to your point."

"Here we are," continued Nick. "Perhaps you observed when we came ashore that the docks are all piled up with machinery of every description waiting to be shipped to the interior. Supposing we confiscate a few crank-shafts, armatures, cylinders, and carbureters, go to that pestilential swamp they call the capital, and tell the President we have with us the greatest ice-machine of the age, one that a baby can operate. Can you see what'll happen?"

For a few moments Cruiser was silent, thinking hard.

"That all depends upon the President," he remarked at length. "Some of these 'dobie dictators are amenable to allegories and some have graduated from the moss-incrusted class. If perchance Plumbago has wandered from the shores of Guatadoria and gazed upon the sights and sounds and smells of civilization, then the bottom drops out of the ice-business then and there. We'll have to get up a quiet little poker-game in the wine-room of the palace some night. If, on the other foot, the virgin soil of his innocence has never been plowed, then the first moonless night that comes along we'll hire a few wagons and sidetrack a few loads of miscellaneous machinery. The rest is up to me. That United Fruit Spanish of yours is all right for barroom oratory, but it won't do at all for diplomatic negotiations where every verb must be conjugated properly and quietly.

"You must stay here in this unburied Pompeii while I go off to Naranjo, a trip of a hundred kilometers as the buzzard flies. Once there I'll get the consul that represents the land of the free to arrange an interview with the President. Then to the ruler of the destinies of this great and mighty empire on which the sun never sets, I'll speak a few words about the advantages of ice in all its branches, from the raw material used for cooling alcoholic booze and mountain-tops, to those toothsome, ladylike by-products known as sherbets, biscuit tortonis, café parfaits, and lemon meringues.

"If my seed falls on good ground I'll get him to agree in writing to buy the machine for twenty-five thousand dollars gold, payable only when I have delivered a complimentary chunk of ice at the palace. This will give him confidence in my chicanery.

"For two or three weeks afterward I'll hang around the refrigeratorium making a bluff at putting up the machine, then you must sober down and get busy *pronto*. The Pacific Mail steamer *Limari* is due here in twenty-one days on her way home to Liverpool, and all you'll have to do will be to tell Bigsby, the chief steward, that you're a friend of mine and he'll give you as big a glacier from his cold-storage cabin as you want. Well packed and wrapped, it won't be anything of a job to smuggle it to me overnight. After that there's nothing left but to collect the *dinero* and make for Santa Rita. You meet me here and the next boat for Peru is ours. I've got a bond

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issue for a linoleum-mine in my suit-case. I think I can place it in Lima."

Nick wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"You've got the right idea," said he. "But if I had as much brains as you I'd quit wandering on foreign strands. I'd be in the illegitimate business in Wall Street. However, let's get down to brass tacks and ascertain the pedigree of President Plumbago from one of these native sons."

At the cost of a cigar they quickly secured the desired information. Plumbago had never traveled beyond the boundaries of his native land. The persimmon was ripe.

THREE days later, baked and blistered by the clinging folds of a frock-coat and high hat, Cruiser marched down the main street of Naranjo. He was now an expert on refrigeration, and behind him trailed a most imposing string of ox-drawn wagons loaded with machinery.

He represented the Safety-Freeze Process, which was the latest and most scientific, sanitary and sagacious method of making artificial ice, wholesale or retail. Instead of the old, crude way of freezing a piece of water from the outside in, the new process reversed the procedure and froze from the inside out. Due to this centrifugal action, all impurities in the way of germs, microbes, tadpoles and other marine ingredients were pushed ahead and to the outside of the forming ice-cake, thus leaving the ice itself pure and sweet as driven snow. It was the invention of a Hudson Bay Mexican and had been patented in all countries, including Greenland.

If Cruiser had arrived in town with a Turkish harem, a monoplane or a troop of Japanese acrobats from Bakersfield, Cal., he could not have created any more consternation or excitement. Every man, woman, child and dog in town woke up and came to see the sight. Finally a horde of two reporters came dashing down the street and breathlessly requested the stranger to disclose his intentions, which he freely did. The result was very gratifying.

Unfortunately, however, the consul was down with fever, so Cruiser was compelled to pay out a little bullion to grease the ways into the presidential chamber. Finally he was led into a large, gaudily furnished salon, the walls of which were decorated with crape-bordered oil-paintings of fifteen different presidents that had been assassinated while on duty. At the end of this room Plumbago, a tall, dignified man with sallow skin and white hair, politely and graciously welcomed the American to the capital. After the preliminary introductions and incantations were over, Cruiser sat down on a red-plush chair and in the most courteous and gentle terms stated the object of his journey from the Mecca of the North.

But the President smiled cynically and shook his head.

"Let us change the subject, señor," said he, "and I will give myself the pleasure of introducing you to my charming daughter, one of the most——"

Cruiser jumped to his feet and lifted a bold, protesting hand.

"*Dispênseme, señor,*" said he, "but I must first settle this question which is burning into my very soul."

With that he flung off his coat and started in real earnest to paint a verbal picture of the woes and miseries of Guatadoria. It was a pathetic appeal.

"*Señor Presidente,*" he exclaimed in a voice that trembled and broke as a preacher's does when he asks for an offering of two or three hundred thousand dollars toward the support of the mission to the Chu-Chus or the Bowery bums, "life without ice is like a dish of *arroz con pollo* without the *pollo*. If you had one of our machines the poor sufferer racked with pains and aches would be relieved immediately. Infant mortality, homicide, suicide, herpicide and family trouble would cease. The rebel, no longer hot and feverish and thirsty for blood, would lay down his rifle and machete for all time and go back to work on the plantation. Peace and prosperity would walk hand in hand like the Dago and the Turk. Guatadoria with her mountains and her seas, her sunny skies and her resplendent stars, would take her rightful place on the front page of the geography books of the world, and fish would keep for days.

"A country so bountifully endowed with natural resources, with a beautiful capital filled with fair and noble women, and a view from the cemetery that has its equal nowhere on earth, can not afford to be behind in a matter of this kind. For the small sum of twenty-five thousand dollars gold I will build for you a modern ice-plant, complete in all respects, the conditions being

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that not one centavo will be paid me until I have delivered a block of ice at the palace.

"Illustrious señor, think, just think, what this will mean to your poor, sweltering people. They will never forget you. Statues in your honor will be erected on every block, and when you read such inscriptions as 'Plumbago, the Benefactor of Mankind,' or 'The Noblest Names of Antiquity Lose Their Luster in His Presence,' you will never regret the day that you met one who has the interests of his fellow men so deeply at heart."

This and much more spake the soldier of fortune. When he concluded, he was weeping bitterly, and soon the President felt the call.

He had never before realized what bad shape his subjects were in; he began to bawl too. They might both have been bawling yet had not the Secretary of War, who kept his munitions in the basement of the palace, complained that water was coming through on his powder and shot. Moaning desolately, the President touched a button and ordered the ladies-in-waiting to mop the floor.

HALF an hour later *el Americano* left the royal residence, his face contorted by a smile. He had not met the Señorita Sootina, but in his pocket was a written, certified promise from the President to pay $25,000 gold the day that a block of ice was delivered at the palace.

The natives went crazy with delight when they heard the news that they were to have a refrigeration-system, although only a few of the very best people who lived in houses and wore clothes with hooks and buttons on knew what ice was. Nevertheless they all danced and drank and sang, and had a gay old time—just as we would do if our Congress reduced the price of steak or gas or furniture.

The following day Plumbago, at the head of an army of ragged, barefooted soldiers, came solemnly forth from the palace to preside at the birth of the Naranjo Ice Company and to witness the screwing of the first nut on the great machine that would make life worth living in the blazing capital.

Under a triumphal arch, desecrated with an engraven image of the President, the coat of arms of the Republic, and the Spanish equivalent of "His Highest Ambition the Happiness of Mankind," the procession, which was two blocks long, passed on its way to the factory, an old 'dobie structure formerly used as a jail. Inside, the birth and beauty and flower and chivalry of the land was gathered for the ceremony, the ladies radiant in magnificent gowns of diaphanous cheese-cloth, the men perspiring in the customary clerico-undertaker garb known as evening-dress.

While the *mozos* carried round champagne, the President made a passionate speech on the subject of peace and prosperity, ending with a toast to P. Cruiser Putnam, the greatest American of the age. This roused the people to a violent state of enthusiasm. Cries of "*Viva la Republica*," "*Viva la Libertad*," "*Viva el Gringo*," and *viva* every old thing on earth filled the air for nearly fifteen minutes. Cruiser sat with his arms folded on his bosom, his face one vast, contented smile. It was the crowning moment of his infamous career.

When the tumult was over, Sootina, the President's daughter, a wonderful vision in a slender gown of shimmering yellow garnished with green, blue, old rose and scrub-oak, came gliding forward and was introduced to the Gringo. She was a caramel-complected, panatela-shaped cowslip about thirty-five years of age, slim as a nymph and scraggy as a moulting hen, with a baritone voice set in a receding chin; black hair and eyes to match. Two of her upper front teeth protruded several inches, thus putting a finishing touch to her features and giving her a dainty, walrus-aspect. More than this, she was sprightly, vivacious, and coquettish; a perfect tornado of personality. Upon Cruiser she smiled most bewitchingly, plucked an orchid from a wreath cleated to her waist-line, and looped it into his buttonhole.

It was a tense, dramatic moment. Just as the American was about to declare himself ineligible for the vacant position of husband, the band struck up the national anthem and played it nineteen consecutive times.

Then Cruiser did his little act. In full view of the excited populace, he dramatically seized a monkey-wrench and tackled the Herculean task of making an ice-machine out of part of the mechanism of a steam-shovel and a stamp-mill.

It was an awe-inspiring sight. Luckily for the Chief Engineer of the Naranjo Ice Company, the Guatadorians did not savvy

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much about engineering or applied mechanics.

Two weeks passed. For an hour each day Cruiser visited the factory, and as an evidence of good faith he took off his coat and hammered loudly away at the unrecognizable mass of machinery lying about the floor, taking particular pains to see that the door was always open wide to allow the excited natives to watch the invisible progress.

When not engaged in this irreligious occupation, the iceman was in the Café de la Three Historic Mules, buying absinthe for cabinet-ministers, army-officers and the flotsam and jetsam of the capital. He was very popular, also very drunk most of the time. On several occasions he grew particularly playful and wrecked every chair and table in the place, but he paid the bill next morning without checking the footing.

The news that the expert on refrigeration was creating sounds of revelry by day and breaching the peace by night eventually reached the ears of the President, and he began to grow suspicious. At last he sent word that unless the machine was in operation in a week, he would have Cruiser tied to a post in the cathedral-yard and shot. And to complicate matters further, Plumbago nominated two hobo-looking soldiers, one with a cutlas, the other with a rifle and bayonet, to see that the Gringo did not leave the city.

Strange to say, this had a wonderfully sobering and stimulating effect upon the Chief Engineer. He despatched a special messenger to Nagel instructing him to get ice anywhere, anyhow, at any cost, and ship it to the capital.

FOUR long and miserable days passed. Cruiser's ever-present escort drove him almost frantic. He could neither eat, sleep, drink nor be merry. Of a sudden Naranjo was startled with the telegraphic news that a revolution had broken out in Santa Rita. Under cover of darkness, General Alfaro, a gnarled old veteran of sixty-five campaigns and ten society-scandals, landed a force of rebel troops and seized the town, pouring upon it a terrific fusillade of ivory-nuts, machine-bolts, ten-penny nails and general shrapnel from a fourteen-inch gun made out of well-casing.

It was a low-down, non-union trick, attacking a God-fearing town in the dark, besides being contrary to all military and social etiquette. The President was greatly annoyed at this fresh attempt to wreck the pillars of National Independence, and took it as a personal insult.

Fearful lest the capital might be similarly attacked some evening when his troops were not looking, he posted sentries on the outskirts of town with instructions to shoot all suspicious persons on sight. Unfortunately the first night happened to be very dark and everybody looked suspicious to the fear-stricken sentries. Twenty-two law-abiding recruits on their way home to the barracks after an afternoon's target-practise with bayonets received a bullet apiece.

While this was all very satisfactory from Cruiser's point of view, yet it made him anxious to obtain his money before the treasury was depleted by the expense of suppressing revolutions or burying suspicious characters. Fortified with the belief that Nagel would deliver the goods at any moment, he notified the President that the machine was now on the verge of completion and that within a day or two he might expect to receive a sample of its cooling product. But the executive's interest in ice had waned. The insurrection was sufficient to occupy the whole of his attention. At the same time, he refused to send Cruiser's barbarian body-guard back to the barracks.

That same day another shock came over the wires. General Alfaro, the rebel leader, had been killed. Brave warrior that he was, scarred and scarified from head to foot, he had died where he had lived—on the field of battle. A mule kicked him in the stomach.

The whole country was plunged into mourning. Flags were hung at half-mast and crape covered every door. All enmity and malice were done with now. Rebels and rascals and federals and fishwomen wept together in sorrow. Outwardly the President was sorely grieved at the loss of his old friend and opponent, and commanded that the unfortunate General be buried with full military honors in the shady side of the cemetery. Inwardly—but no. There are times when the truth should not be put into words.

The following day the coffin reached Naranjo. It was a great and impressive funeral, a spectacle that commanded profound

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admiration as well as professional jealousy in the hearts of the three living commanders-in-chief of the army.

For a moment let us pause to say a word of praise for that ever-bashful master of ceremonies, the undertaker. Señor Cadavero was a man of culture and refined taste, and everything from the free *frijole* lunch served in the cemetery to the masked ball at night was on a royal scale. The floral decorations and immortelles would have filled a scow.

Upon the shoulders of six stalwart troopers, the carved-mahogany casket was carried through the streets, a halt being made at each of the deceased warrior's favorite cafés for some eulogizing statesman to deliver a speech or recite an original poem. Even Cruiser contributed a few words, despite the fact that the corpse owed him fifty pesos, having borrowed that amount one night in a gambling-house.

That was a true case of brotherly love triumphing over brazen lucre. Deep in every man's heart, no matter how black he may be, the seed of brotherly love lies smoldering. A little incident like the death of a rich uncle or the lynching of a friend and that seed bursts into flame. The man wanders abroad through the land lending fives and tens to all comers when he knows full well that he'll never get them back on this side of the Rio Jordan.

They buried the fossil remains of General Alfaro in six or eight feet of earth and fired sixteen or eighteen volleys over his grave, to kill him from fright in case he wasn't properly dead all over. And there in the twilight cold and drear they left him, regretted by a mourning world. He was a loving husband, a devoted father and a darned old scamp.

Forty-eight hours later everybody was sober and the country settled down once more to the ordinary routine of life. Save for the usual fighting over the border-line, without which no Central or South American republic could possibly be happy, there was peace in the land, pesos in the treasury.

AS CRUISER sat in his little room cursing his relentless body-guard outside and wondering whether the cessation of hostilities at Santa Rita would revive Plumbago's interest in the advantages of cold storage, a knock came on the door. In response to the invitation, a young army-lieutenant in red trousers and yellow jacket, with a deadly-looking sword dangling down his starboard side, entered the room and announced that the President was ready for the ice, this being the last day of grace. Moreover, there was a banquet in honor of a lot of departed saints and other illustrious people at the palace in the evening, and Plumbago was anxious to give his guests a treat in the way of a frozen confection.

Cruiser looked wearily at the harbinger of good news and bad tidings.

"Return to your lord and master in his castle on the hill," said he with a languid gesture, "and give to him my Christian regards. Say to him that the ice won't be cold enough to cut until to-morrow. You see, *amiguito mio*, the thermal equivalent of the refrigerating liquid has to——"

But the swordsman had gone.

"I wish those miserable buzzards that call themselves a body-guard would go too," said Cruiser to himself as he ran his fingers through his hair. "I don't care much about being shot. As a matter of fact I don't believe in capital punishment, especially in this particular instance.

"I wonder why that sheep-herder from Texas never sent the ice. I suppose he's been drunk all the time. That comes of trusting a friend. After all, friendship's a very intangible asset, a bond without a coupon. You can't sell it and the bank won't take it as collateral. From henceforth I shall tread this world like a multi-millionaire—friendless and alone, and——"

Just at this point came the sound of a loud and important voice outside. A moment later the high-hatted, grave-faced *Intendente de Policia* entered the room, followed by four ragged little policemen. Bringing up the rear were the two buzzards.

They took the soldier of fortune to jail and stowed him safely away in a damp, dark cell, away from the toil and turmoil and tribulation of the world. Of course no man of ordinary intelligence objects to going to jail once in a while for a little visit with a select group of bankers, brokers and lawyers, but it is adding insult to imprisonment to expect said man to pay his own board while awaiting his own execution. Yet this is exactly what those trousered savages expected of the distinguished prisoner.

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He balked at first, but when his legs grew shaky and his heart grew heavy, he sent out for a peso's worth of *chile con carne à la El Paso*. After a few days of this old-time southern hospitality, something happened. A grave-looking priest introduced himself into the condemned cell.

"My name's Guitterez," said he in a low, serious tone.

"I'm much obliged to meet you, *padre*," said Cruiser deferentially.

For a long moment the two stared at each other in silence. Then softly and gently the priest broke the news.

"At daybreak," he said.

That was all, but it was enough, dear friends, enough.

Cruiser was never so surprised in all his life. To die without a trial, without a jury, without a word of publicity of any kind, was certainly an experience. He refused to believe it. But presently when the band in the prison yard commenced to practise that old song, "We Shall Meet but We Shall Miss Him," instinct told him that it was all over.

Never was clay-made man placed in such a hopeless position. What a night of anguish it was! Just at daybreak an idea came to Cruiser the crestfallen, and the light of sacrifice, without which no short story is complete, shone dull green in his eyes.

"Take away your powder and shot," he said to the hangman in a soft, repentant voice. "I am going to marry Sootina Plumbago."

And he did.

IT WAS a great wedding. The day was declared a *fiesta*, and the town was decorated with washing, Chinese lanterns, flags, bunting, smilax, syntax, and palm-leaves. There was a banquet, a ball, a bull-fight, a cock-fight and a firework.

As the unhappy groom came staggering forth from the cathedral, his gushing bride dangling over his arm, he halted sharply. There among the crowd of well-wishers, shoe-throwers, and unboiled-rice-pitchers stood Nick Nagel, the unfaithful partner. For a moment they glared amiably at each other in silence, then Nagel broke loose in a string of impressive Western quotations.

"What's the matter?" he asked with a rancid grin. "Have you been down with brainal meningitis?"

"Matter!" bellowed Cruiser fiercely. "If it wasn't for you, you Lone Star Judas, I wouldn't be hopelessly tied and tangled to this foolish virgin on my right. Why in the name of the fourteen pig-tailed Mexicans didn't you send the ice? I suppose you were too busy sitting in the grand stand watching the revolution."

Nagel looked puzzled.

"Revolution? There was no revolution. When I got your message saying that Plumbago was worrying about his ice, I bribed the *telegrafista* to send those war-bulletins to take the old man's mind off such a cold subject till the *Limari* got in. I was just playing for time, that's all. Didn't you get my letter?"

"No, sir, I did not. You must have been sober when you wrote it. This is the first time I've heard of you since the day I left Santa Rita."

"But you got the ice."

"Ice!" roared Cruiser, making a feint with his hand as if trying to push an imaginary locomotive off the track. "Don't mention that word in my presence again. It sends a chill up my spine. If I had received the stuff, why should I marry this mammy long-legs and be followed by blue-spectacled detectives the rest of my days to see that I don't escape by land, water, gas or chloroform?"

Nagel's face grew full of anguish.

"Listen," said he "and let me explain. "Just after buying old General Alfaro a bottle of cognac and getting his permission to report him as dead to provide an additional topic of thought to occupy the President's mind, I hit upon a good idea to smuggle the ice into the capital. I sent you enough to supply half the town, all packed in flannel and sawdust inside of the best carved-mahogany, zinc-lined, air-tight, water-proof, bomb-proof coffin I could buy. Didn't you get it?"

Cruiser gave his erstwhile partner one long, miserable look.

"Yes, we got it," he said wearily, "and we gave it the swellest military funeral you ever saw. Get out of the way. You're blocking the honeymoon procession."

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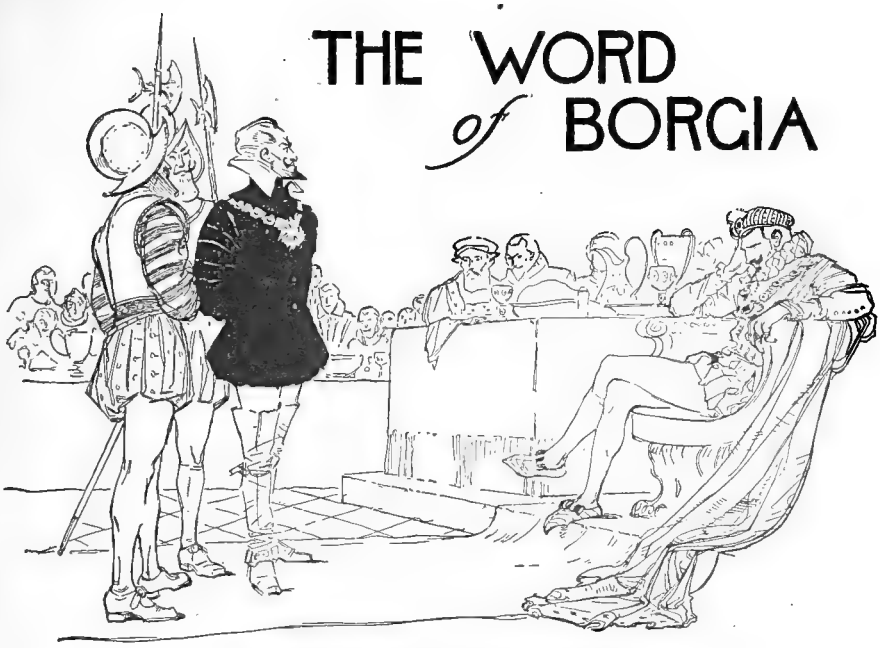
THE WORD of BORGIA



By Rafael Sabatini

MISTRUSTING the object of this gathering to which so secretly he had been bidden, Messer Graziani ambushed a half-score of his men about the street below, with orders to force their way into the house should he smash one of the windows as a signal.

Therefore it was with a mind comparatively at ease that he entered the long, low-ceilinged room where the conspirators awaited him. Situated in the mezzanine, this room ran the entire width of that palace of the Lord Ranieri, near the Bridge of Augustus, in Rimini, and overlooked the street at one end and the River Marecchia at the other.

It had an air of gloomy splendor; the walls were hung with gloomy tapestries, the carpet was of darkest purple, and amid the sparse furniture there was a deal of ebony, looking the more funereal for its ivory inlays. It was lighted by an alabaster-globed lamp on the ponderous overmantel, and by two silver candle-branches on the long table in mid-apartment. An enormous fire was roaring on the hearth, for it was a bitterly cold night of January, and the snow lay thick upon the city.

Graziani was cordially received by the Lord Ranieri—a portly, florid patrician of middle age—and conducted by him to the table about which the five remaining conspirators were seated. One of these rose instantly to add to Ranieri's his own welcome of the *condottiere.* He was a tall and very stately gentleman, with a long, swarthy face that was rendered longer by a brown, pointed beard. He was dressed in black, but with a superlative elegance, and a medallion of brilliants blazed upon his breast. He was the Prince Sinibaldi, a nobleman of Venice sent as an envoy by the Most Serene Republic to felicitate Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois and Romagna, upon the recent conquest of Rimini.

Now this ambassador it was—and not Ranieri—who had bidden Graziani to that meeting. And it was this circumstance that had awakened the suspicions of the young Borgian soldier, ever mistrustful of all that came from Venice.

Of the others—whose eight eyes were intent now upon Graziani's face—three were gentlemen of Rimini, men of little account to the *condottiere;* but the fourth—a slight, untidy fellow with a ghastly, hollow-

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cheeked face and lank hair that was faded to the color of ashes—he knew for a Roman named Gino d'Agnolo, and his presence went to swell the soldier's mistrust.

The fellow had but one hand—his left—which was as gnarled and yellow as a hen's foot. The other he had left in Rome together with his tongue, having been deprived of both by order of Cesare Borgia, whom he had defamed. His hatred of the Borgias and his virulence had been terrific; and they remained unabated by his punishment, though their expression was temporarily curtailed.

His fierce eyes glared mistrustfully at Graziani as the officer took the seat that was offered him; he opened his empty mouth to make a horrid, croaking sound, accompanying it by gestures to the Venetian.

THE Lord Ranieri resumed his seat at the table's foot; at its head Prince Sinibaldi remained standing, and from the breast of his doublet, where two buttons were unfastened, he drew now a small ebony and ivory crucifix.

"When we shall have made known to you the reason for which we sought your presence here to-night, Messer Graziani," said he, "it shall be yours to determine whether you will lend us your aid in the undertaking that is afoot. Should you refuse, it shall be yours to depart as you have come. But first we must engage you by solemn oath that neither by word nor deed shall you divulge what may be revealed to you of our designs."

The Prince paused. Graziani reared his young head and looked slowly round the board. All eyes were upon him intently, alive with a mistrust and enmity that naught could efface but the oath required of him.

Sinibaldi gently pushed the crucifix down the table toward him.

"First, upon that sacred Symbol of our Redeemer ——" he was beginning, when Graziani pushed back his chair and rose.

He knew enough. Here was for certain a conspiracy against the State or against the life of his lord the Duke of Valentinois. It needed no more words to tell him that; and he was no fool to bind himself by oath to a silence that must make him a party to the treason.

"Sirs," said he, "it is not my way to thrust myself blindly into any business and make oath upon matters that are unknown to me. Suffer me, therefore, to take my leave at once."

He stepped back from the table, clearly intent upon departure; and instantly all six were upon their feet and looking to their weapons.

Graziani turned to the Lord Ranieri, who had flung himself between the soldier and the door.

"My lord," said he, "I came hither in friendliness, bidden to your house with no knowledge of what awaited me. I trust to your honor, my lord, to see that I depart in like case—in friendliness and with no knowledge of what is here toward. I would urge ——"

A stealthy sound behind him made him turn, and Agnolo—who had crept up—leapt upon him, fierce as a rat, his dagger raised. The blade descended, and snapped upon the links of the shirt of mail the soldier wore beneath his quilted doublet.

The next instant Graziani had caught up that wretched wisp of humanity by the breast, and had dashed him across the room. The mute hurtled into one of the conspirators who stood midway between the table and the window, and threw the latter off his balance, so that in his turn he staggered against an ebony pedestal, and sent the marble Cupid that had occupied it crashing through the casement into the street below.

It was more than Graziani had intended, but no more than he could have desired. He observed the effect, smiled grimly, whipped out his blade, swung his cloak upon his left arm, and attempted to reach the door backward. But his enemies closed about him to cut him down, and when one sword had been shivered against his armored body, the remaining sought to reach his head.

He defended himself desperately, intent upon gaining time. If he could but hold out for a few moments, his men would be there in answer to the signal of the broken window. With that intent he backed before them until his shoulders touched the tapestried wall. There they pressed him hard, three swords at once, and he had no chance of further breaking ground, no chance of lessening the number of his opponents, no chance of doing more than parry their blows until relief should come, and little chance of that.

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SUDDENLY Sinibaldi's blade licked in and out again with lightning quickness in a feint, and was swung round to a cutting stroke at Graziani's head. Dazzled, Graziani was slow to the parry. He threw up his blade, but too late to do more than break the force of the blow as it descended. The edge, though somewhat deflected, sheared through his bonnet and laid his scalp open.

He dropped his sword, slithered gently down the wall, and sat huddled at the foot of it, insensible, the blood streaming down over his face. Sinibaldi was for putting a dagger through the soldier's windpipe, and thus making quite sure of him, but he was suddenly checked by the horrible, vehement outcry of the mute who had remained by the window, and simultaneously by blows upon the door below.

For a long moment the conspirators stood at gaze, smitten with sudden terror, whilst the blows upon the door were repeated and loud voices summoned them to open.

Ranieri swore thickly and horribly.

"We are trapped! Betrayed!"

Uproar followed, until the mute showed them the way out. He had crossed the room at a run, and, nimble as a cat, he had leaped upon a table under the window that overlooked the river, from which the house rose sheer. He never stayed to open. The acquaintance he had already made with Borgia justice quickened his terrors to the point of frenzy. He hurled himself bodily through, shivering the window and going down in a shower of broken glass to the black, icy waters below.

Like sheep they followed him. One after another they took the leap. Fortunately for them the tide was flowing, and it bore them up toward the Bridge of Augustus, where they could effect a landing—all save Agnolo, the mute, who was drowned, and Sinibaldi, who remained behind. Like Graziani, the Venetian, too, had come to that meeting with a shirt of mail under his doublet; and he had bethought him that this armor must sink him. So he had paused to doff it, vainly calling upon the others to wait for him.

Ranieri had answered him, standing upon the table, ready for the leap.

"Wait?" he had echoed. "Are you mad? Is this a time to wait? Now more than ever must the thing be done, or we are all dead men—and it must be done to-night, as was planned. Your men are at their post. Come on, then!"

And he went through the window, and into the water with a thudding splash. Like an echo of it came a crash from below to announce that the door had given way. Heavy steps thundered up the stairs.

SINIBALDI, tearing still at the buttons of his doublet, sprang desperately for the window and wondered a moment whether he should risk drowning. Then he remembered that after all as the envoy of Venice he was inviolable, a man upon whom no finger was to be laid without provoking the resentment of the Republic. He had nothing to fear where nothing could be proved against him. Not even Graziani could have said enough to imperil the sacred person of an envoy; and Graziani, he was assured, would never say anything again.

So he sheathed his sword and composed himself.

The door burst open and Graziani's men swarmed in, all ten of them, so furiously that they bore the Prince backward and all but trampled on him. A grizzled ancient, leading them, checked in mid-chamber and looked round, bewildered until he espied his fallen captain huddled at the wall's foot. He roared his anger at the sight, what time his men closed about the saturnine Venetian.

With as great dignity as was possible to a man so circumstanced, Sinibaldi sought to hold them off.

"You touch me at your peril," he warned them. "I am Prince Sinibaldi, the Envoy of Venice."

Over his shoulder the ancient answered him:

"Were you Prince Lucifer, Envoy of Tophet, you should still account for what was doing here and how my Captain came by his hurt. Make him fast!"

Vainly did the Venetian storm, threaten and plead. They disarmed him, bound his wrists behind his back, and thrust him from the room, down the stairs and out into the snow-spread street.

Four remained above with the ancient who, on his knees, was looking to his Captain. And Graziani began to show signs of life. With one hand he smeared away some of the blood from his face, and opened his eyes dully to survey his ancient.

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"You were no more than in time, Barbo," said he, his voice hoarse and feeble. "Get you to my lord Duke. Tell him that here was some treason plotting—something that is to be done to-night—that will still be done by those who escaped. Bid His Magnificence beware. Haste, man, I——"

"Their names! Their names, Captain!" cried the ancient urgently.

But it was as if by sheer will Graziani had kept a grip of his senses until he could utter his warning. That done he relinquished the painful hold and slipped back into the peace and shadows of unconsciousness.

II

IN THE Communal Palace of Rimini a great banquet was spread in honor of Cesare Borgia, the conqueror—the "*Minister Divinae Justitiae*"—who had delivered the State from the thraldom of Pandolfaccio, the hated Malatesta. Gathered there was a great number of repatriated *fuorusciti*—the nobles whom Pandolfaccio had exiled from his dominions that he might strip them of their possessions.

Jubilant, assured that Borgia justice would right the wrongs that had been done, these patricians gave free expression to their high spirits. Present too were the ambassadors and envoys of several powers, sent to congratulate the Duke upon his latest conquest. But it was in vain that Cesare turned his beautiful hazel eyes this way and that in quest of Sinibaldi, the princely Envoy of Veince.

The Orator of the Most Serene Republic, the smug and portly Capello, was in attendance, seated near the Duke. But the Envoy Extraordinary was nowhere to be seen; and Cesare, who missed nothing and left no riddles unsolved—particularly when they concerned a power so crafty and so hostile as that of Venice—was vexed to know the reason of this absence. It was the more remarkable in that Sinibaldi's princess—a stately, blonde woman, whose stomacher was a scintillating cuirass of gems—was seated on Cesare's right hand, between the sober black of the President of the Council and the scarlet of the handsome Cardinal-Legate

The young Duke lounged in his great chair, a tall, supple gentleman of some five and twenty years, resplendent in a close-fitting doublet of cloth of gold that was edged with miniver. His pale, beautiful face was thoughtful, and his tapering, jeweled fingers strayed ever and anon to the point of his tawny beard.

The actual banquet touched its end, and the great hall, about three sides of which the tables were set, was being cleared by the seneschal. A comedy was about to be performed for the company's delectation. Tragedy, however—all unsuspected—was in preparation; and the actor who suddenly stalked in to speak its prologue, thrusting aside the lackeys who would have hindered him, was Barbo, the ancient of Graziano's company.

"My lord!" he bellowed. "My lord Duke!" And his hands fiercely buffeted the grooms. "I tell you, fools, that I must speak instantly with his Highness."

The company had fallen silent, some startled by this intrusion, others wondering if this might be the opening of the comedy that impended. One or two rose to their feet. But it was Cesare who spoke, his voice crisp and metallic, bidding the man approach.

"What brings you thus?" quoth he, when Barbo stood before him.

"Treason, my lord," said the soldier, startling the company with that ugly word.

Cesare signed to him to proceed, and the fellow plunged headlong into the speech he had prepared.

"Messer Graziani lies senseless with a broken head, else were he here in my place, Most Potent. By his command, we—ten men of his company—broke to-night into the palace of the Lord Ranieri, and——"

"Stay!" the Duke interrupted him peremptorily. "We are too public here."

But that was not his real motive. The real motive was that at Barbo's words Cesare's keen ears had caught the sounds of a sudden gasp and rustle on his right. He had shot a glance in the direction of the sound to see that Sinibaldi's lady had sunk back in her chair, her cheeks livid, her blue eyes staring with terror.

In a flash his swift brain had laid fact to fact and had found the solution of the riddle that had earlier puzzled him—the riddle of Sinibaldi's absence. He knew now where Sinibaldi had been that night, though he had yet to learn what manner of treason the Prince had been engaged upon.

He rose, and the company rose with him out of deference—all save Sinibaldi's Princess, who made the effort, but failed in it,

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as Cesare noted. He waved a hand to the feasters, smiling urbanely.

"Sirs and ladies, it is my desire that you be not disturbed by this." He turned to the President of the Council: "If you, messer, will give me leave apart a moment with this fellow——"

"Assuredly, my lord, assuredly!" cried the President, flung into a sort of confusion by Cesare's lordly deference. "This way, Magnificent—this closet here—you will be private so." Stammering, fluttering, he stepped down the hall to throw open a side-door. Drawing back, he waved the Duke into a small antechamber.

Cesare entered, followed by Barbo. The door closed upon them, and beyond it there broke forth a babble of excited voices, as the guests fell to discussing this interruption.

Shortly now Barbo related the happenings of that night at Ranieri's house, repeating what Graziani had bidden him, and announcing that he held captive at least one of the conspirators—the Prince Sinibaldi.

"I trust that in this I have done nothing to deserve reproach, Magnificent," the fellow added with some hesitation. "His Excellency spoke of being an envoy of the Most Serene——"

Cesare waved his doubts aside.

"You have done well," he cut in shortly.

He turned, and strode the chamber's length and back again, slowly, fingering his beard, his brow dark with thought.

"You have no hint of the aim of the conspiracy? Of what this thing is they are to attempt to-night?" he asked.

"None, my lord—alas!"

"Nor who the men were that escaped?"

"No, my lord, save that one of them would probably be the Lord Ranieri."

"Ay—but the others—— And we do not even know how many there were."

Cesare checked. He remembered the Princess Sinibaldi. She knew. Her bearing had betrayed that knowledge. He smiled darkly.

"Desire the Princess Sinibaldi to attend me here."

Barbo saluted and withdrew. Soon the door opened again. Barbo ushered in the princess, and at a sign from Cesare vanished.

THE Venetian lady stood before Cesare, deathly pale, her bosom galloping. With the very courtliest grace his Highness waved her to a chair. She sank into it limply. She moistened her dry lips, her startled eyes upon the Duke's face.

He set his finger-tips upon the edge of the table, and leaned across toward her.

"I have sent for you, madonna," he said, his tone the very gentlest, "to afford you an opportunity of rescuing your husband's neck from the hands of the strangler."

"Oh, my God!" gasped the afflicted woman, and clutched her bosom with both hands. "I knew it! My heart had told me!"

"You alarm yourself without need," he said, and no tone could have been more soothing and reassuring. "Prince Sinibaldi is a prisoner below, awaiting my pleasure. But my pleasure, madonna, is your pleasure. I place his life in your hands."

She looked at him—looked up into that beautiful, smiling young face, into those hazel eyes that looked so gentle now—and cowered a moment, abjectly. Then her spirit rallied. He saw her stiffen, and if her voice shook there was defiance in her glance.

"My lord is the accredited envoy of the Most Serene," she said. "His person is inviolate. A hurt to him were a hurt to the Republic whose representative he is, and the Republic is not slow to avenge herself. You dare not touch him! You dare not! You dare not!" Her voice grew strident.

Smiling still, he bowed. "I will leave you happy, then, in that conviction," said he, with a note of mockery so sinister that it broke her new-found spirit into shards.

She staggered to her feet, a hand to her heart, her eyes dilating.

"My lord! My lord! A moment! Have pity!"

He paused, his hand already upon the latch.

"Pity, madonna, as I have told you, lies with you. Your husband has been taken in treason. If—as I seem to see—you love him, and would not have him strangled this very night, it is yours to rescue him."

Wildly she scanned his face for some clue to his meaning. Thus in silence for a dozen heart-beats. Then—

"What—— What do you require of me?"

Slowly he retraced his steps until he stood before her again. "All that is known to you of this conspiracy in which he was taken."

She covered her face with her hands and moaned a little. She swayed a moment. He steadied her with gentle hands, and gently pressed her back into her chair.

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"It is true," he explained, "that I do not wish to embroil myself with the Most Serene. And so I seek to gain my ends by gentle measures. But by the saints! if my gentle measures do not prevail with you, Prince Sinibaldi shall be stretched taut on the rack, and what is left of him shall be strangled afterward—ay, though he were an envoy of the Empire itself. My name," he ended, "is Cesare Borgia. You may have heard of me."

Of his determination his words left her no slightest doubt; and she had heard of his ways, as he suggested. She looked into his eyes again, and caught avidly now at the straw he held out to her.

"You give me his life for this information?" she cried.

"Tell me all you know of the treason that was plotting this night at Ranieri's, and I swear to you by my honor and my hopes of heaven that neither I nor man of mine shall hurt so much as a hair of Sinibaldi's beard."

"He may blame me——" she began faltering.

Cesare's eyes gleamed.

"He need never know," said he insidiously. He was eager now. Reluctantly did he offer such a bargain. But it must be made. The matter was urgent. The blow —whatever its nature—was to be struck that very night; so that time pressed. He must learn at once, and at all costs, how to elude and parry it.

"You pledge me your word——" she began again.

"Already have I pledged it, madonna, and I do not forswear myself."

AT LAST he drew from her the sum of her considerable knowledge. Last night the Lord Ranieri had visited her husband. Already had she suspected that Sinibaldi was plotting with this friend of the fallen Malatesta. So she had been spurred to listen; and she had overheard that it was against Cesare Borgia's life that they conspired. Ranieri spoke of this banquet at the Communal. Cesare was to be escorted by torch-light back to the fortress of Sigismondo where he was lodged; and that should be their opportunity.

At some point on the road two crossbowmen were to be posted, to shoot the Duke as he rode by. To make doubly sure of Cesare's offering a fair mark, it was to be arranged that no mounted guards should hang upon his flank at this point; the halberdiers, being footmen, would not signify, as the crossbowmen could fire over their heads. To insure this Sinibaldi proposed to seduce Graziani, whom he had some cause to believe disaffected.

"That was all I overheard, my lord," she ended.

"Enough, as I live!" snorted Cesare, his eyes blazing.

His countenance flung her into fresh terror. She rose in her agitation, and appealed to him to remember his plighted word. He put aside his wrath, as a man puts off a mask, and smiled.

"Have no doubt," said he. "Neither I nor man of mine shall lay a finger upon your husband. And now, madonna, you were best away, I think. You are overwrought."

She confessed it, and professed herself glad to depart.

"The prince shall follow you," said Cesare, as he hurried her to the door. "But first we shall endeavor to make our peace with him. Be content," he added, noting the fresh terror that leaped to her eyes—for she bethought her of what manner of peace Cesare was wont to make with his enemies— "he shall be treated with all honor. I shall convert him by friendliness from these traitors who have seduced him."

"It is so! It is so!" she exclaimed eagerly.

He bowed his agreement, and opened the door. He entrusted her to the President of the Council to conduct her thence and to her litter; then he stepped back to his place at the head of the board, and set a brave example of mirth, as if not a care or thought weighed upon his mind. Thus he restored a gay humor to the feast.

But when the President had returned from his mission, Cesare raised a finger, and signed to the steel-clad Barbo, who stood waiting as he had been bidden.

"Bring in Prince Sinibaldi," he said, and with that laid constraint and silence anew upon the company.

The Orator of Venice, the portly, slimy Capello, heaved himself to his feet, and, in the intensity of his perturbation, made so bold as to go round to Cesare's chair, to whisper a protest in the ducal ear.

"A little patience, sir," was all that Cesare answered him; but the glance in the Duke's eyes drove back the flabby ambassador like a blow.

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THE double doors at the hall's end were opened, and Barbo returned with Sinibaldi and an escort of four men of Graziani's company. The prince's wrists were still pinioned behind him; he was without hat or cloak and his clothes were in some disarray.

The company's amazement deepened; a murmur ran round the board. At a sign from Cesare the guards fell away from the Venetian, whilst Barbo paused to remove, at last, the prisoner's bonds.

Sinibaldi, the very incarnation now of scornful dignity, held his head high and boldly fixed his eyes on Cesare's impassive face. Then, without being bidden, he burst into angry speech.

"Is it by your Potency's commands that these indignities are put upon me—upon the sacred person of an envoy?" he cried. "The Most Serene, whose mouthpiece I have the honor to be, whose representative I am, is not one lightly to brook such treatment."

Cesare sniffed delicately at his pomander ball.

"I trust I apprehend you amiss when I gather that you threaten. It is not well to threaten us, Excellency; not even for an Envoy of the Most Serene." There was something terrible in the cold, level tones, something still more terrible in the eyes that smiled upon the Venetian, so that Sinibaldi quailed and lost much of his fine arrogance, as many another tall fellow had done when face to face with the young Duke of Valentinois.

Capello in the background wrung his hands and suppressed a groan.

"Let us hear, my lord, your own version of this night's affair," quoth Cesare.

The Venetian had his tale prepared, and out it came forthwith. It was the tale that might have been Graziani's, and was cunningly adapted to Sinibaldi's need.

"I was bidden, my lord, in secret to-night to the house of my lord Ranieri, urged by the statement that a matter of life and death was to be treated which concerned me closely. I found a small company assembled there; but ere they would tell me the purpose of that gathering, they desired me to make an irrevocable oath that whether or not I became a party to the matters that were to be disclosed to me, I would never divulge a single word of it, nor the name of any whom I had met there.

"I am not a fool, Magnificent, and I scented treason, as they knew I must. I would have drawn back; but already had I gone too far in going there, and it was plain that they would never suffer me to depart again to spread the alarm. So in self-defense I took the oath imposed; and having taken it I announced that I desired to hear no more of any plot that might be theirs, and I begged them to let me depart now that they had sworn me to silence.

"But men of their sort are easily fearful of betrayal. They refused to let me go; a fight ensued in which one of them fell to my sword. Then the noise of our brawling brought in a patrol. The conspirators flung themselves from a window into the river. But I—having nothing to fear since I was innocent of any evil—remained, and so came to be taken."

There was a gasp of relief from Capello at that explanation.

"You see, Magnificent, you see——" he was beginning.

"Peace, man!" the Duke bade him impatiently. Then very courteously he turned to Sinibaldi.

"My lord," he said, "it grieves me that you should have been mishandled by my guards; but you will perceive that until you told your tale the appearances convicted you; and so, you will acquit us, I am sure, of any discourtesy to the representative of the Most Serene.

"I may add that in the case of any one less accredited, I might be less ready to accept the explanation you have proffered, and I might press for the names of the men who, you are satisfied, were engaged in treason."

"Those names I should already have afforded your Magnificence, but for the oath that binds me," answered Sinibaldi.

"That, too, I understand; and so, my lord, I do not ask a question which you might have a difficulty in answering. Let us forget this unhappy incident. A place for the Prince Sinibaldi—here at my side. Come, my lord, let me play host to you, and make you amends for the rude handling you have suffered in this my city. Here is a wine that in itself should be some recompense. A whole Tuscan Summer is in every flagon."

Scarcely believing himself so easily out of his terrible position, wondering whether he were not perhaps dreaming, Sinibaldi sank into the chair that was set for him at the

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Duke's side. The men-at-arms clattered out, the mimes were summoned to perform their comedy, and the evening wore merrily on to its conclusion, what time Cesare Borgia played the host to the Venetian prince, leaving him overwhelmed by the courtly charm in which no man of his day could surpass the Duke.

And whilst he laughed and jested, Cesare's mind was pondering the situation. He was wondering how far the Serene Republic herself might have a hand in this matter, how far Sinibaldi might be an agent sent expressly to do this work of murder. At every step, in every way, Venice had betrayed her hostility. By arms and money she had secretly reinforced his enemies against him. By intrigues and audacious slanders she had sought to embroil him, now with France and now with Spain. Was Sinibaldi the hand of the Republic in this affair?

It behooved the Duke to walk with caution. He must respect the word he had pledged to Sinibaldi's lady; yet he must punish Sinibaldi, and he must take the fellow's confederates so that the treason be stamped out. And he must perform all this without giving Venice the least cause for grievance, remembering that Sinibaldi's story was not to be refuted since Graziani —the only man who knew the truth besides Cesare—was insensible and not likely to live.

Toward midnight, at last, Cesare rose to withdraw. But not yet would he part with his new-found friend Sinibaldi. The Venetian must ride with him to the citadel—ay, and the Venetian Orator, too, must be of the party.

Arm in arm the Duke of Valentinois and Prince Sinibaldi went down the hall and along the gallery toward the great courtyard, where men were getting to horse and ladies into their litters, and where a hundred torches were already blazing.

Near the guard-house a lackey in Cesare's livery of black advanced, bearing the Duke's cap and cloak.

NOW it happened that this cloak—which was of tigerskin very richly laced with gold—was as costly as it was conspicuous. It was a present that Sultan Bajazet had sent the Borgia out of Turkey; and Cesare had worn it constantly since the cold weather had set in, not only out of his love of splendor, but also for the great warmth that it afforded.

As the lackey now advanced with that noble garment, Cesare turned suddenly to his companion.

"You have no cloak, my lord, and it is a bitter night. Since out of loyalty to me you lost your own, let me replace it and at the same time offer you this poor token of the esteem in which I hold you and the Serene Republic which you represent."

He took the cloak from the servant and held it for the Prince. Sinibaldi's eyes looked into Cesare's. The Duke was smiling; and yet, to the Venetian there was something terribly significant in that smile. Cesare knew. Sinibaldi realized it, and saw that he was trapped.

What could he say? How, short of an open avowal, short of declaring that the wearing of that cloak would be a danger to him, should he decline the proffered honor? And in that moment the fat Capello shuffled up, rubbing his hands in satisfaction, for he had overheard the Duke's gracious words.

"A noble gift, Magnificent!" he purred. "And the honor to our Prince will be held by the Most Serene as an honor to herself."

"Nay," laughed Cesare, "it is no more than the Prince's due."

Sinibaldi alone caught the sinister second meaning of the words, and trembled in the heart of him, cursing Capello for a fool. Then he took courage. He bethought him that it would be more than likely after what had passed that the conspirators would hold their hands that night. If so, then all would be well. After all, Cesare could no more than suspect. With definite knowledge the Duke must have acted in a more definite manner.

Reasoning thus, Sinibaldi recovered some of his assurance, murmured some words of gratitude and hints of his unworthiness, and submitted to have the cloak thrust upon him and even a scarlet velvet cap, which, too, was Cesare's own. Then he mounted the splendid charger that likewise—further to do him honor—Cesare placed at his disposal. And all the while Messer Capello stood by, licking his lips to see so much deference paid the envoy of his Government.

"That is a lively horse, my lord," said Cesare to the prince, at parting. "But my footmen will be about you in case it should

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grow restive." And again Sinibaldi read the threat that underlay the words, and conceived their true meaning to be that it would be futile for him to attempt to escape the test to which he was being submitted.

Thus they rode out through streets that were still thronged to see this magnificent cavalcade flanked by footmen bearing torches. And few perceived that the tall man on the splendidly caparisoned horse, in the scarlet bonnet and tigerskin cloak, riding with the Venetian Orator for only companion, was not the Duke of Valentinois; few paid any heed to the man in the black cloak and heavy hat, who rode a little way behind, almost eclipsed by a group of gay cavaliers that surrounded him. And such was the clamor of the crowd that none heard the twice-repeated twang of an arbalest from a house at the corner of the Piazza della Citadella. But the grooms sprang forward to seize the bridle of Sinibaldi's charger, and a great uproar was raised when the man in the tigerskin cloak rolled sideways from the saddle with an arbalest-bolt in his brain.

First was heard the awful cry:

"The Duke is dead!"

And then, as if by magic, there, on horseback, sat the duke himself, his brazen voice ringing above the din and confusion.

"In there!" he shouted, flinging an arm toward the house. "In, I say; and see that not a man escapes you. It is the Envoy of Venice whom they have murdered, and they shall pay for it with their necks, whosoever they may be!"

The house was already surrounded, and into Cesare's net fell the four conspirators together with two *sbirri* who were of the household of Sinibaldi, as their liveries showed.

They were dragged forward into the square, where a great circle had been formed by the torch-bearers, and at last the truth of the matter entered the sluggish brain of Capello. Sinibaldi had been mistaken for the Duke. Had the Duke, he wondered, so intended it? If so, heavy should be the reckoning with Venice. He swung round upon Cesare, a fury in his eyes. But ere he could speak Cesare had seized him by the shoulder and was pointing to the stricken Ranieri and his fellow-prisoners.

"Look, Messer Capello!" he cried. "Look —Ranieri, of all men, to have done this thing. And the others—all Sinibaldi's friends; and two of them in his own livery —his own servants, as I live! And they have murdered him!"

And Capello understood that to declare that Sinibaldi had been shot in Cesare's stead was to declare that Sinibaldi had planned the shooting—to convict by a very simple inference the envoy of the Most Serene.

Blankly, trembling, Capello looked into the Borgia's eyes, and saw that the Borgia mocked him. And, bitterer still, he was forced to play the dupe; forced to pretend that he saw in this no more than Cesare intended that the world should see. He stifled his rage and chagrin, and stood there with bowed head. He must play the part imposed upon him.

"My lord," he cried, "I appeal to you for justice against these murderers in the name of Venice!"

"It shall be done, sir. Trust me to avenge a servant of the Most Serene."

Next morning six bodies dangled from the balcony of the house whence the bolts had been shot—Cesare Borgia's justice upon the murderers of Prince Sinibaldi.

He was pleased when Capello came, white-faced, to thank him in the name of the Republic for that summary justice; but best pleased to reflect that he had kept his word to the prince's lady, and that neither he nor any man of his had set a finger upon Sinibaldi to avenge the Venetian's plotting against himself.

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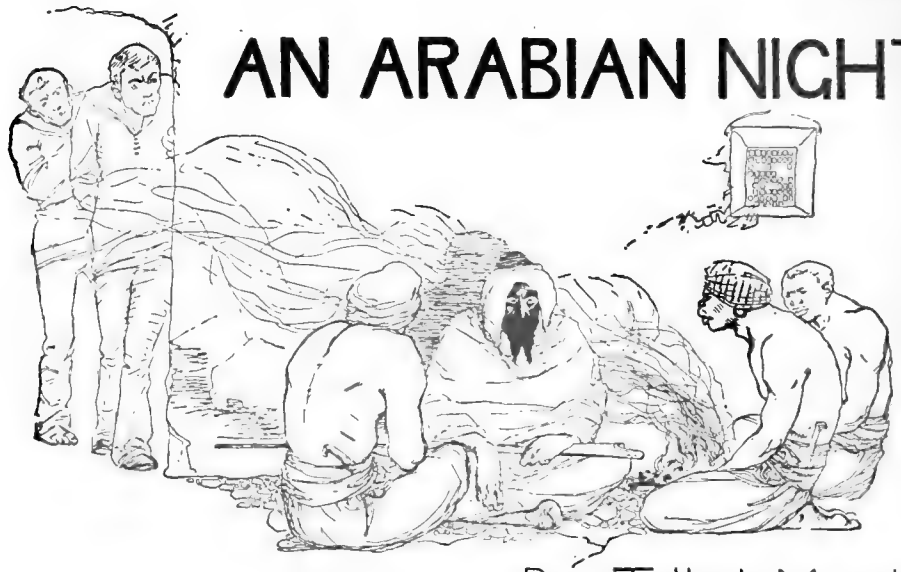

AN ARABIAN NIGHT

By Talbot Mundy

HER Britannic Majesty's paddle-wheel gunboat *Agamemnon* squattered up the Persian Gulf under double awnings, contriving—to the accompaniment of fearsome noises from the engine-room—to leave behind her eleven oily, shark-infested knots per hour.

Down in the stoke-hole they were teaching Old Nick himself a thing or two about high temperatures, with leaky boiler-tubes and number one Madras dust and clinkers to make steam with; and in the engine-room, where the heat above the cylinders was quite unthinkable, but was a mere nothing to the inferno down below them, the oilers and engine-room artificers were taking turn-about to keep the hose-pipe turned on the bearings.

They were engaged in the remunerative sport of "hurling it loose on the slaver, and seeing the slave set free;" so no one, from lieutenant-commander downward, had the slightest sympathy for engineers who swore—with fistfuls of sweat-wet cotton waste in each hand—that she'd bust to blazes if they didn't cool her off a wee. They were told emphatically to let her bust—as well as several other things which are scarcely printable, but which are currently supposed to ginger up the souls of engineers.

Up on the bridge, the lieutenant-commander paced to and fro in nervous irritation, cursing the engines and the men who built them with frequent and amazing fervency. But down on the lower deck, sweat-swimming in the stifling air-blanket of the Persian Gulf, the able seamen sat and chewed the rag contentedly.

Curley Crothers, for one, naked to the waist, and cross-legged at a table, seemed very far from exercised in mind. He leaned his elbows on the table and laid the law down cheerfully to his disciple Joe Bing.

"Thank Pete," said Curley, with a prophetic twinkle in his port eye, "we're both in the starboard watch, matey!"

"'Cause why?" asked Bing.

Joe was a mere innocent of seven years' service, but singularly wishful to be taught.

"The starboard watch is due for shore-leave first, my son."

"Well? What's the odds? We shan't get no shore-leave this side o' Bombay."

"No? 'Ark to the hengine-room. That's the 'igh-pressure cylinder-cross-'ead 'ottin' up; she'll jam between the guides in 'alf a tick—you mark my words."

"What if it does? We'll waller about 'ere till them pore sufferin' oilers 'ave unjammed it, that's all."

"What? With our 'Oratio Halgernon Heccles in command? Not us! 'E's makin'

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now for some perishin' coral-port, where 'e can lay to for repairs, an' get information an' send the boats away, an' give us beans. It's a case o' whether the hengines 'll 'old out till we makes it, that's all!"

The officers and crew of the *Agamemnon* were being paid for rescued slaves on the time-established schedule, which allows twice the price per head for slaves rescued on dry land. So they had chased every *dhow* they saw, until the engines throbbed, and even the holding-down bolts showed signs of giving up the game; and in the very short intervals, when the slavers had been chased ashore and the gleeful, cash-encouraged crew had leaped after them to round them up, the engineers had had hardly any time to execute repairs. But, as explained already, the engineers got little sympathy.

A stoker came up now, half overcome by the awful heat, and leaned against the table between Bing and Curley.

"S'ELP me Pontius Pilate!" he panted, wiping the streams of perspiration from his face with a filthy piece of waste. "If 'e don't bank the fires soon, an' give us a chance to patch 'er up a bit, this 'ere perishin' *Agamemnon* 'll be one big, bleedin' scrap-'eap. We've stuck bunion-plasters on the perishin' guts of 'er until she's nothin' but one big, bleedin' bunion-plaster; the boiler-tubes leaks like a everlastin' sieve; an' as for the hengine-room, John 'elp them as 'as to work there, that's all I 'as to say."

"Is she really goin' to bust?" asked Curley, with polite interest.

"Bust? She's goin' to come apart. She ain't got a bust left in 'er. She'll just shiver an' sit down, an' fall to bits."

"Well," said Curley, cutting a liberal slice from a piece of twist-tobacco, "you blokes 'urry up an' get it over. Me an' my mate 'ere wants shore-leave."

"Shore-leave!" said the stoker. "*You*'ll get shore-leave! We'll get leave to take the guts of 'er to bits, an' make the hengine-room an' stoke-'ole into a perishin', bleedin' scrap-'eap, an' then put the 'ole box o' tricks together again. An' on top o' that, there ain't no air to breathe in the bloomin' hengine-room—not when she's stopped there ain't—and there ain't room to swing a bleedin' cat down there neither."

"All the same," said Curley, waving a tattooed forearm politely to terminate the argument, "I 'opes as 'ow she busts. You bloomin' furnace-feeders don't know when you're well off."

The stoker went below again, muttering infamy, and Curley transferred his quid carefully to the other cheek.

"But what's the good o' shore-leave?" demanded Joe Bing. "There ain't anything to do in these 'ere Persian Gulf ports."

"Not if you don't know 'ow, there ain't," agreed Curley, with an air of retrospective wisdom. "Trouble is, crews always goes ashore without a propagandrum. They agrees the place wants livenin' up, an' there they're right; but when they starts in to paint it a everlastin' pea-green color, what'll stick pea-green for keeps, they finds as 'ow it's all been done afore 'eaps an' 'eaps o' times, an' they don't get no encouragement. It's my belief that old King Solomon painted these 'ere Persian Gulf ports the color what they are, an' nobody with no originality 'asn't been 'ere since."

"What was 'e adoin' 'ere?"

"Collectin' skirt for 'is 'arum, like as not."

"What's a 'arum?"

"Hignorance," said Curley, pointing at Joe with a knotted forefinger, and nodding to emphasize it, "is a crime, Joe Bing. And a 'arum is a place, within' the meanin' o' the act, where Mohammedans an' sich keeps their women-folk."

"Ho! You means a hayreme? Now I got yer! 'Ave these blokes 'round 'ere got hayremes?"

"You bet your life they 'ave. An' that's the idea. They keeps 'em locked, an' double-locked, an' padlocked, an' sets great big black guards to watch 'em, an' nobody 'asn't never seen the hinsides of 'em. Me an' you'll go ashore the first chance we get, an' visit a 'arum, an' paint the hinside of it that bright vermilion that the sheik what keeps it, an' the perishin' females what 'e 'as inside of it, an' the eunuchs, an' the guards, 'll talk about us for ten year to come. We won't leave no doubt whatever about our 'avin' been there, Joe my boy, and we'll bring away a 'andful o' sooveneers apiece to show the rest. We'll 'ave a reputation we wouldn't swap wi' the Admiral o' the Fleet, afore we've finished."

"My eye!" said Joe Bing, in almost speechless admiration of his mess-mate's brilliancy. "I'd never ha' thought o' that!"

"In course you wouldn't. An' none o' the other blokes wouldn't neither. An' that's

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why these 'ere Arabian ports are such forsaken dull places. Me an' you'll wake up the first one we drops anchor in."

IN DUE course of time the *Agamemnon* wheezed and groaned and sidled between the reefs off Abu Fatera, and dropped anchor opposite a long square building, from the windowless walls of which a red flag with a crescent on it floated lazily.

"'Ll that be a hayreme?" asked Joe, helping Curley Crothers make all snug on the fo'castle head.

"No, stoopid! That's a fort, same as the one we blew to smithereens three weeks back at whatsisname. They keeps their 'arums out o' sight. We'll get shore-leave some time to-morrow, an' I'll show you a dozen of 'em."

But Curley proved wrong for once. The ship's commander, with thoughts of impending furlough, and a deplenished bank-account that could be properly replenished only by means of rescued slaves, was mad-angry at the enforced delay. Almost the first thing he did after dropping anchor was to give orders to his second in command not to let the crew grow mushrooms on their feet; and the anti-mushroom campaign began next morning.

The top-hamper was ordered down on deck, and ordered up again; and the process was repeated until Curley Crothers's good-natured comments to his bosom friend Joe degenerated into cuss-words pure and simple. Then, the quick-firers were dismounted and stowed away below, only to be hauled out again and mounted, in an ever-decreasing number of tenths of seconds.

The decks were holystoned until even the commander himself had grudgingly to admit that "they might look almost decent in a day or two;" and after paint had been plastered on her already spotless sides, and he had had a boat lowered, and had been rowed round her, he grew almost enthusiastic for a moment.

But he found fault with the rowing, which was nothing short of awful. As he said, commenting on it out loud for the men's especial benefit, a crew of soldiers could have made a better showing. Bow dipped his oar in at least a hundreth of a second after number two, and finished nearly a quarter of an inch too deep. The rest were ragged—very ragged; and slovenliness was the one thing that Lieutenant-Commander Horatio Algernon Eccles could not and would not stand.

So rowing became the order of the day, and of the days that followed, under the perspiring supervision of the second in command, overseen from the point of vantage of the bridge, raucously and even blasphemously by the "owner" in person.

The men slaved at the oars with a will, for as Curley said, "there won't be no shore-leave until the old blighter's satisfied," and a day came at last when the "owner" intimated that he had seen worse rowing on occasion, and that for the present he would try to pretend that they could make a decent showing. He prayed fervently, though, that no merchant-service crew would come along and put him to shame before all Arabia. And that was rather exaggerated praise from him; it struck the crew as being almost fulsome.

"And that's the end of it!" said Curley with a sigh. "They ain't 'alf done in the hengine-room, an' 'e can't think up any more misapplied monkey-motions for us, not to save 'is bloomin' life."

Curley was right this time. Down below every man available was fitting and forging, and artificing and sweating in streams, in an atmosphere as tangible as steam. The chief engineer was drawing intricate designs in white chalk, and swearing and erasing them again; the second twirled the adjusting-screw of his micrometer; and the third and fourth engineers apologized at intervals. But the engine-room still looked like a scrap-heap. The commander himself squinted at it through the grating and nearly had a fit.

"How long will you be yet?" he asked the chief.

"Give it up."

"Oh, well," said Eccles to his second in command, "I suppose you'd better let the men go ashore if they want to."

"And now," said Curley, who was polishing the breech-mechanism of the starboard aft seven-pounder and who took care to overhear, "I'll sing thee songs of Araby, Joe Bing, my boy!"

II

SO AT sunset on a sweltering July night the rowlocks of an eight-oared cutter creaked across the greasy ripples to the rancid Abu Fatera beach, followed at a decent distance by two huge

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tiger-sharks—one on either hand, like an escort of torpedo-boats. The cutter's nose, dripping phosphorus and scum, rose over the last weed-burdened ripple; the oars were tossed and the cutter grounded amid the stink. A dozen men or more, with their commander's admonition still ringing in their ears to observe the decencies and respect the prejudices of the inhabitants, climbed out in a hurry, and the cutter backed away.

"Ten o'clock, you men!" cautioned the boatswain, as the oars gave way again. The tiger-sharks resumed their station in the rear (in case of accidents), their big dorsal fins sticking up above the water sharp-silhouetted in the moonlight, and the Arabian Night—generaled, or rather admiraled, by Curley Crothers—had begun.

The twelve, straw-hatted and appareled in immaculate white drill, clustered round Curley, the oracle. Curley's knowledge of Arabia, judging from his own account, was second only to the cyclopedia, and they sought information.

"What's doin'?" inquired the spokesman. "What's the game, Curley?"

"What's doin'? Why, the prejudices of the perishin' inhabitants is goin' to be observed proper an' discreet. Me an' my mate Joe 'ere 'as got a hassignation teachin' 'em some new ones what won't 'ave to be observed so bleedin' careful. You blokes do anything you please, always bearin' in mind the hadmonition of 'Oratio Halgernon Heccles. The sea's be'ind yer, and Arabia's in front; 'elp yourselves. Come on, Joe."

"Oh, I'm off to see my last new gal,
She's a pretty little, nervous little dunce!
Any sudden sort o' treat
Might knock 'er off 'er feet,
So I musn't let 'er see me all at once!"

Joe whistled the refrain, and Curley caroled it, and together they strode up the stinking sandy beach—two white-clothed Galahads in search of trouble, picking their fastidious way carefully among the rotting carcasses of fish and putrescent oyster-shells.

"Phew, it's 'ot!" said Joe Bing, removing his hat to fan himself.

"Not 'alf so 'ot as it's goin' to be, time me an' you are through with it," said Curley optimistically.

The absolute, uncanny silence of an Arabian hot-weather evening hung over them like a heavy pall; the shadows between the buildings on ahead of them were blacker than the *Agamemnon's* bunkers, and the walls, irregularly zigzagged along their tops like battlements, looked like a painted panorama.

"We'll wake this den o' thieves up afore we're through."

"What like are the women in these 'ere hayremes? Arabs?" asked Joe, forever dipping at the fount of Curley's wisdom.

"Arabs? Well, of all the chuckle-'eaded tomfools, Joe, you take the bleedin' bun, you do. Arabs! Them Arab women are that evil-lookin' an' atrocious that they 'as to keep 'em covered up, even in the 'ouse. D'yer kid yerself an Arab sheik 'ud waste good money providin' for a bunch o' *them?* Not 'im. Them Arabs knows a thing or two. The kind what they keeps in 'arums is Circassians, an' French, and Eyetalians—an' they keeps 'em there too! Keeps 'em double-locked under guard. I'll show yer by an' by. You wait!"

They strolled with their hands deep in their trousers-pockets through a part of the bazaar where silent, white-robed Arabs eyed them sullenly.

"Friendly-lookin' cusses, ain't they?" suggested Joe, who always felt friendly, and resented sulkiness in others—with his clenched fist as a rule.

"They don't like 'avin' their debauches put a stop to," said Curley the wise. "They plays up Old 'Arry after dark until a gunboat shoves its nose in 'ere; then they 'as to pretend to act virtuous; an' the blighters don't like it." (As has been suggested already, Curley Crothers's knowledge of Arabia and its customs was almost infinite.)

"If you treats 'em friendly, though, they cottons to it quick enough. Let's go an' pass the time o' day to that 'ook-nosed assassin over there. Come on!"

THEY lurched over to where a solemn-looking Arab sat in a darkened doorway, puffing his narghile, and saluted him politely.

"*Salaam,*" said Curley, with a would-be high-society bow.

"*Salaam aleikoum,*" boomed the Arab, continuing to puff at the narghile and apparently not moving a single muscle of his face.

"See?" said Curley. "They answers yer all right, if yer knows 'ow to treat 'em proper."

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"Ask 'im where 'is 'ayreme is," suggested Joe.

"You got a 'arum?" demanded Curley. "Place full o' houris?"

The Arab showed his teeth.

"See 'im grin!" said Curley gleefully. "What did I tell yer! The —— old scoundrel's got a hundred wives, I'll bet yer what you like! Come on Abraham!"

He bent down toward the Arab and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Show us 'round. We'll dance a 'ornpipe to please the gals! *Bohut-atcha*, eh? We'll be'ave!"

The Arab spat and shook his shoulder free and muttered.

"Watch out!" said Joe; "'e'll knife yer in a minute!"

The moonlight glinted on two feet of polished steel that sneaked stealthily from among the Arab's voluminous white folds.

"Ah-h-h! You would, would yer?" snarled Curley. "That'll be one o' your bleedin' prejudices, eh? Take that, you hook-nosed poly-whatsisname."

His right foot shot out handily, giving the lie to the seeming clumsiness of a sailor's bell-bottomed trouser-leg. The knife rang against the wall and fell into the sand, where Joe Bing pounced on it; and another kick, just as suddenly directed, smashed the bowl of the narghile into a hundred pieces.

The Arab rose, muttering unthinkable indecency into his red-dyed beard and backed into the doorway.

"*Kismet! Bismillah!*" sneered Curley, exhausting his remaining store of Arabic, but not by any means his stock of tricks. Out shot his right foot again, and the Arab tripped and fell headlong.

"Grab 'im, Joe," he ordered, and Joe obeyed, sitting—two hundred pounds of him at least—on the Arab's head.

"Whoa, Emma!" he ordered, settling himself down more firmly as the Arab tried to writhe. "What's next, Curley?"

But Curley was too busy at the moment to reply. Deft, agile, inquisitive fingers were running through and through the Arab's raiment, and Curley's right knee, undelicately rammed into the pit of the Arab's stomach, held the victim still.

"Ah-h-h!" said Curley suddenly. "Thought as much."

He pulled his hand out and displayed a six-inch Colt revolver, cocked and loaded.

"These swine knife first, and shoot you afterwards," he explained. "Now for the rest."

In went his hand again, tearing at the white linen, and feeling all around the Arab's ribs. The Arab let out an agonizing yell, but it was smothered on the instant by Joe's enormous hand that shut on it like a vise-clamp.

"I've got 'em!" said Curley, pulling out his hand again.

"Got what?"

"Seed-pearls! This coast's thick with 'em. These 'ere sheiks all carries 'em to swap with instead o' coin. Come on now, let 'im up! We've paid 'im good an' proper."

Curley slipped a little canvas bag into his trousers-pocket and picked up the revolver. The Arab rose and began to start an argument. Joe slipped behind him and the Arab turned. And at the exact, psychological, fate-inspired moment when the Arab was poised to best advantage a kick from Curley landed on the bone, just where it hinged when he sat down, and he shot through the darkened doorway, head-first as if dynamite had hit him.

"I 'opes as 'ow we've observed 'is bleedin' prejudices," said Curley, as they resumed their stroll. "We'll kick the next sheik we see, on sight, an' do the talkin' afterwards. 'F we wants to see the hinside of a 'arum, Joe my boy, we'll 'ave to invite ourselves. Come on; let's find one."

BOTH of them armed and with a little bag of seed-pearls to the good, Curley and his disciple started off in real earnest on their quite unusual quest. Joe never for a second disputed Curley's leadership, and he was perfectly content to follow him through a maze of stifling, mud-walled alleys, where the smell rose up around them in the characteristic, romantic manner of the East. For, as Curley said, "they keeps 'em on the houtskirts, Joe, where nobody won't be none the wiser when the old man feels like puttin' the kibosh on one o' his mas-in-law."

They emerged after a while into the moonlight once again, where there was no sound but the whimpering and scurrying of frightened jackals, and where the awful stench at last gave place to the cleaner, less stifling air from across the desert. And on the border of the desert, right in front of them, upreared like a bastile in the moonlight, was a long, square, battlemented building.

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"Now that," said Curley, pointing with his forefinger impressively, "that'll be a 'arum."

"My eye!" said Joe.

He almost whispered it, for Curley's manner had impressed him quite as much as he intended.

"It's like a barrick," said Joe, standing open-mouthed in front of it. "Where's the guards?"

A white-robed Arab, silent as a vulture, gloomy and suspicious-looking, and motionless as death itself, peered down at them from the roof-top with eyes that never blinked. Save that the long barrel of his prehistoric rifle quivered every now and then, he might have been the image of a sentinel, instead of the alertest thing in Abu Fatera. Joe walked thirty paces sideways, to get a look at him against the moon; the Arab's body remained as motionless as ever, but his head turned slowly to follow Joe Bing's movement.

"Keep on walkin', Joe," advised Curley. "Walk right round the building. If 'e sits still here an' watches yer all the way round, 'e'll wring 'is bloomin' neck."

"Try 'im both ways," said Joe. "You walk one way an' I'll walk the other; then maybe 'e'll go crazy."

"That wouldn't do no good. 'E'd make a noise if 'e went crazy. You just oughter see a Arab run amuck. They makes more noise than the *Agamemnon's* engines. We've got to settle that bloke, though, afore we can get in."

"All right," said Joe. "I could 'it 'im from 'ere easy with 'alf a brick. Shall I go a'ead?"

Curley paused a minute before he answered. The leadership was up to him and it behooved him to use all his wisdom.

"There ain't no 'alf-bricks," he said after a moment, still pondering. "Say, that's the dooce-an'-all of a big 'arum; an' only one stuffed owl of a sheik guardin' it. We ought to work this all right. Now I wonder; is that bloke on the roof the 'usband or is 'e the 'usband's 'ired man?"

"No 'usband what 'ad any sense would 'ire a bloke like 'im; not with all them women to look after," suggested Joe. "I'll bet 'e's the 'usband. 'E looks kinder melancholy, don't 'e? 'S though 'avin' all that 'arum-full to watch kep' 'im awake o' nights."

Curley walked leisurely around the building, his every movement followed by the mysterious-looking individual on the roof. There were no windows in the walls; not a sound came through to intimate what or who might be locked up inside; and there was only one door, a great iron-studded affair, strong enough by the look of it to resist a siege. Curley was thinking—thinking—thinking.

"'Ow do we go about it?" asked Joe at last, growing visibly impatient.

"'Ush!" said Curley, stepping aside into the shadow of one of the buildings they had left. "We acts umbrageous!"

Curley's movements now became so mysterious that Joe could do nothing but watch him in open-mouthed astonishment and admiration.

"Find me a stone!" said Curley; and Joe sought about among the shadows until he found one.

"Got any paper?" was Curley's next demand. But neither of them had any. Paper seldom forms part of the litter of an Arab village.

"Tear a bit off your singlet."

"'Aven't got one on."

"Nor've I. I've got to 'ave something that'll do to wrap this stone in."

"Afraid to 'urt the blighter's 'ead, if you 'its 'im too 'ard?"

"Maybe. Think o' something."

"'Ow about a boot?"

"Come on!"

Joe stooped down and pulled off a boot; he clung to it on second thoughts, though.

"I've got to walk back," he explained.

"You'll get your boot back all right," said Curley. "Come on; 'and it 'ere!"

He pulled out the little bag of seed-pearls and began to open it.

"'Ere! None o' that," said Joe. "We go 'alves on the loot. You ain't goin' to give 'im them are you?"

"'Alves it is!" said Curley. "Meantime, you trusts me with a boot an' one pearl. 'And the boot 'ere!"

There was no resisting Curley when his mind was really made up and he was exercising the full prerogative of leadership. Joe handed him the boot. Curley put the pearl in it, stuffed in a handful of dried date-leaves, and rammed in the stone to keep it all in place.

"Now then!" he ordered. "You wait 'ere, and watch!"

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HE STEPPED out into the moonlight then and began attracting the attention of the guardian of the roof. First he whistled. Then he held the little bag of pearls aloft, and waved it to and fro. The Arab sat and watched him, apparently with absolute indifference, making no answer to his signals and not even understanding them, for all that any one could judge. Curley whistled again. Still the Arab made no answer.

Suddenly, though, Curley seemed to have made up his mind that the time was come for action. He held up the boot now and waved that to and fro for half a minute; then he whirled it once and threw it, whizzing like a bat straight for the Arab's head.

"Lord love 'im," muttered Joe in blank astonishment. "Why couldn't 'e use 'is own boot?"

The Arab ducked, and the boot missed him by about an inch.

"Now watch," said Curley, stepping back into the shadow again.

They watched; but nothing happened. The Arab did not even look to see where the boot had fallen apparently; he just sat still where he was and gazed at them with mild, half-curious interest.

"I believe the blighter's glued there." Curley was beginning to lose faith in his scheme; but his feelings were jubilant compared to Joe's.

"Oo cares if 'e sits there till the crack o' doom?" he objected. "'Ow about me, eh? I've got to stop 'ere, I suppose, until I gets my boot back? Take off one o' yours, you 'orny-footed blighter, an' give it 'ere. Maybe you fancies 'oppin' 'ome on one foot!"

"'Ush!" said Curley. "Watch!"

Another head appeared above the parapet, then a pair of shoulders, and another six-foot-barreled gun. The new-comer, hooded and silent and white-robed like the first, leaned his elbows on the parapet and gazed at them for five full minutes before he made a sign. Then he turned and disappeared.

"'E wanted to thank yer for my boot," suggested Joe, dismally.

"'Ush, you fool," commanded Curley. "'E's gone to open the gate."

"Not 'im!"

JOE was right; but Curley, as it happened, was not altogether wrong. A curly-headed negro made his appearance on the roof, and a moment later a primitive rope-ladder came tumbling from the parapet.

"And if that's not an invitation," said Curley, starting to run across the intervening space, "I'll eat my 'at. Come on, run! Keep that knife o' yours 'andy, but don't show it. Where 'ave you got it?"

"Down my trousies-leg."

"Can you get at it quick?"

"Sure!"

"Come on then!"

They ran together across the open space and clambered up the rope-ladder sailorwise as fast as they had run. Black arms reached out at the top to greet them and help them over the parapet, and the white-robed man who had come in answer to the boot stood waiting for them at the head of a flight of stairs that led downward through a small trap-door. He beckoned to them to follow him, turned his back on them and started downward.

"'Ave you got that revolver ready, mate?" asked Joe.

"Aye, ready!"

"Go a'ead, then!"

They followed the Arab, treading gingerly, for the stairs in front of them were dark; they could just see his white robes down below them. After twenty steps or more they seemed to reach the bottom.

"Got a match?" asked Curley. Joe felt in his pockets.

Before he had found one, though, several pairs of black arms were thrust out toward them suddenly from nowhere, they were pushed into a room, and a door was slammed on them.

III

CURLEY and Joe Bing heard the big bolts tumble into place and then stretched out their arms to feel each other's whereabouts. It was blacker where they were than death.

"When you're through fingerin' my face," said Curley, "I'd like the loan of it to breathe with."

"Where are we?"

"Lord knows. Strike a match an' look."

Joe groped in his pocket, found a match and struck it. The light of it blinded them for a second; then it disclosed a four-walled room, six or seven feet by eight, with a studded door to it, that would not have yielded to a battering-ram. The ceiling

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seemed slender, but was too high up to reach, even if one of them were to stand on the other's shoulders, and the floor was the mother-earth, rammed hard. Before they had had time to investigate the walls, the match went out, and Joe Bing dropped the glowing stump with an oath.

"'Ow many matches 'ave you got?" demanded Curley.

Joe counted, and discovered ten.

"Then, if it comes to fightin'," said Curley cheerfully, "we'll likely 'ave to do it in the dark. What's that smell?"

An acrid, pungent stench began to fill the room—a reek that was almost tangible, and made them cough.

"Strike another match," commanded Curley.

"Smoke!" he exclaimed, as the room was once more suddenly bathed in light that nearly blinded them. "By the Great Horn Spoon, they've set a light to the place! No they 'aven't! Light another match. Quick!"

They were coughing hard by this time, and their eyes were running. By the light of the third match they could see blue-gray smoke billowing up from the bottom of one wall. Curley dropped on his knees and located the inlet before the match went out.

"It's camel's-dung!" he swore, coughing out a throatful between each word. "Quick, Joe, where's your knife?"

"'Ere! I got it!"

"'Ere, I said—'ere, into my 'and!"

He grabbed it and began scraping at the wall above where the smoke welled out.

"Thank Pete," he exclaimed suddenly. "They're only sun-dried brick. There's a bloke on the far side blowin' of it through a 'ole; I can 'ear 'im puffin'. Wait!"

He groped for the revolver, and pushing the muzzle of it through the inlet, fired. Instantly the smoke ceased coming in.

"Seems you got 'im," said Joe, striking another match.

"Got some poor black what was obeyin' orders, I expect," said Curley. "It's the owner o' this 'ere joint as I wants to put a 'ole through."

He was scraping all the time at the mud brick above the inlet and gathering up the *débris* to cram into the hole. After a minute he pronounced it snug and tight.

"'Ere, take the skewer, Joe," he ordered, "an' bore a 'ole big enough to crawl through on the side opposite this."

"Why not opposite the door?" suggested Joe. "We'd get out o' the place that way."

"'Oo's issuin' orders, me or you?"

"Oh, all right. 'Ave it your own way. Gimme the knife." Curley passed it to him.

"If you think as 'ow I gets into a 'arum, and 'as myself kippered like a bleedin' 'erring an' sneaks out again through a 'ole like a perishin' rabbit, afore gettin' even with the sheik, you've got a 'eap to learn yet, my son. 'Urry up an' dig that 'ole; they'll be unpluggin' this one in 'alf a mo'."

Joe dug like a badger with the hounds behind him, while Curley lay with his face along the floor, listening and feeling for more smoke. Presently he felt an augur-point of some kind beginning to twist its way through to his side.

"Bring me a 'atful o' that there loose earth o' yourn, Joe," he ordered.

Joe groped his way across and delivered as much as he could heap into a hat; Curley piled it and packed it round the new inlet, and the burrowing began again. Soon Curley himself took a hand at it, relieving Joe, and in less than fifteen minutes they had pared away the wall until, judging by the feel of it, a good hard shove would leave a hole that they could crawl through.

"Now, matey. All together!"

Both men placed their hands against the thin partition that was left, and at a word from Curley, shoved with all their might. The wall gave way, and Joe went headlong, head-and-shoulders through it, with a heap of crumbling sun-dried mud on top of him. Joe lay still, and Curley listened, fingering the revolver cautiously. He heard a rustling on the far side, and once or twice, he thought, a whisper.

"Joe!" he hissed. "What's in there? Is that the 'arum?"

Joe drew back his head, and shook the dust loose from his hair and ears.

"I can't see, mate," he answered, "it's that bleedin' dark. There's folks in there all right by the sound of it. But if that's a hayreme all I can say is that there ain't no class to 'em. They stinks more'n I care about. Lord love a soldier! No wonder they keeps folks away from 'em. 'Ere, 'ave a smell yourself."

Curley pushed his head and shoulders through the hole, sniffed once or twice, and drew them back again.

"Smells like blacks to me," he said, rubbing the back of his hand against his nose. "Come on, let's crawl through, an' light a

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match, an' see. 'Oo cares! We've been in this 'ole long enough. Let's meet the scrap 'alf way if there's goin' to be one."

Curley crawled through first and Joe Bing followed him.

"THEY don't know we're out yet, matey," he whispered in Curley's ear, as he crawled through. "They've just started on the smoke again."

"Good!" said Curley. "Strike a match, an' let's take a look at the little 'ummingbirds. Lord, don't they 'um!"

Joe struck a match again, and both men shaded their eyes. This time the tiny flare was almost lost in the gloom in an instant, for the space where they found themselves was huge—a hundred feet by fifty at the very least. The match flared up and waned, and——

"Suffering Jehoshaphat!" said Curley, as the tiny stick went out. "Did ye see that?"

"Couldn't make it out quite."

"Blackbirds! Two hundred of 'em!"

"You don't mean it!"

"Strike another one and make sure."

Joe lit another match, and this time their eyes accustomed themselves to the light more quickly; they had time to take in everything before the gloom won out again. Round a huge, closed-in, brick-walled barn, lying head to the wall, and side by side, chained by the feet to one long steel chain that passed through steel pegs driven in the floor, lay more than two hundred black men and women—naked, most of them.

"Are they dead?" asked Joe in an awe-struck whisper.

"No, matey. The poor blighters are as live as me an' you. They're afraid, that's all. Don't disturb 'em—yet!"

"What'll we do?" asked Joe.

Curley turned toward him, pulled his head nearer, and hissed:

"Sh-h-h! This, Joe, is where we acts most particular umbrageous. Oh, crikey!"

He chuckled like a schoolboy.

"What'll 'Oratio Halgernon 'ave to say to this? 'Ow about their bleedin' prejudices, what?"

"But 'ow'll we get out?" demanded Joe.

"We'll stop 'ere," said Curley.

"What, 'ere? In this 'ere stinkin' blackbirds' nest?"

"Lord love yer, no! We'll go an' 'ave our little bean-feast with the sheik now. Strike another match, an' 'old it low down on the stick as you can; I want to take a good look."

Joe struck a match and held it up above his head, while Curley conned the bearings.

"Crikey, look at that!" he said laughing.

The smoke was billowing out in clouds through the hole they had come through.

"They was goin' to dry us out good an' proper, wasn't they, mate? Now by the look of it, this 'ere bulk'ead—" he tapped the wall they had come through—"reaches right across the middle o' the building, don't it? That's the roof up above; there ain't no ceiling. The door's over there, this side o' the middle o' the wall. Never mind about another match; I've conned it good.

"If that door ain't locked—and it didn't ought to be, 'cause these poor blighters 'ere are all chained up — it oughter lead into a passage. And off the passage on the right 'll be the room they think they're kippering of us two in; they'll be working the horacle from the room beyond, unless the passage leads round a corner. Any'ow, they're t'other side o' the next wall to this, and first turn to the right. Now for the door! Got your knife 'andy? 'Ere goes, then!"

He felt his way along the wall, with Joe clinging closely to him. The door yielded at the first attempt, creaking a little as he pushed it gently outward. He seized the edge of it in his horny fist and grabbed it tightly; then he forced it open quickly with an even push, making only one squeak instead of a dozen or more.

Then both men stood still and listened; but the only sound that either man could hear, besides the breathing of the slaves, was the other's heart beating. Curley stepped into the wide passage that the door disclosed, and Joe shut the door tight behind them.

"They'll choke all them pore blackbirds," he whispered. "The smoke's comin' through that 'ole we made like heverything; we'd best 'urry."

"Come on, then," said Curley. "Quiet now!"

They went on tiptoe down the passage. On their right they passed the door of the cell where they had been imprisoned; there was no smoke coming out below the door, so it must have been very nearly air-tight. There was light enough now to see by. It was coming apparently from around a turning to their right. Curley crept silently toward the turning, holding his revolver

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out in front of him, and motioning to Joe with his other hand to keep behind him.

A passage turned off sharp to the right of them, and from down it, besides the dim light, came the sound of mumbling voices and of a palm-leaf fanning fire. Curley moved slowly to the left, away from the turning, and peered down it, while Joe clutched at the wall in feverish excitement.

"HANDS up!" said Curley suddenly, stepping out into the light. "I got yer, ye dirty sneaks! I got yer! Put 'em up above your 'eads! Come on Joe. Stand by 'andy with your knife."

Joe stepped out beside him. The noise of fanning ceased. Down the passage, crouching by a small fire of camel's dung that had been built up against a small hole in the wall, was the Arab who had beckoned them to come down-stairs; and beside him were three coal-black Africans of some kind. The "sheik," as Curley chose to call him, sat with his rifle on his lap and glared deadly hatred; he made no attempt to move, though. Curley watched him, and Joe watched him; and slowly—by imperceptible degrees—one of the blacks began moving toward the lamp. His hand was raised to smash it, when Curley noticed him, and sent a bullet smashing through his brain.

"The next blighter as moves," said Curley, "gets the same dose prezackly."

"Where's that other son of a gun?" asked Joe.

"Dunno. Let's truss this bleeder first; time enough for the other then. Step in lively, an' bind 'is 'ands. Use that girdle 'e's wearin'."

"Not yet, I won't," said Joe. "Look out! Be'ind yer, man! *Quick!* For the love o'——"

BUT Curley turned just in time. His bullet buried itself into the roof-guard at the same second as Joe's knife stuck into him hilt-deep.

"First time I ever used a knife on a man," said Joe. "Ugh! It makes all your fingers bloody."

"Never mind your fingers. Wipe 'em on that sheik's clothes. 'Urry up an' tie 'im."

Joe kicked the "sheik's" rifle from his grasp, and out of reach, where Curley stooped and picked it up. Then Joe trussed up the Arab, using his own girdle, and fixing him with knots that only a sailor could undo.

"What'll I do with these woolly 'eaded sons o' guns?" he asked. There were two that needed attention, and they constituted a serious problem for the moment.

"You can bet your life," said Curley, "that this ain't the 'ole bleedin' outfit. There's 'eaps more of 'em; they'll be skylarkin' down the village, like as not. Wish we could shove these particular blighters in the smoke-'ouse."

"They'd get out through the 'ole we made."

"If you keeps on growin' witty, Joe, I'll 'ave to find a new mess-mate. Look an' see what this 'ere passage leads to. P'raps there's another smoke-'ole, or a cell we can shove 'em into."

Joe found a cell. The two giant negroes were incontinently kicked and bundled into it, and the door was bolted on them. The "sheik" was left lying where he was, with the two dead men to keep him company.

"What next?" demanded Joe.

"Get up on the roof an' find your boot."

They both climbed up the rickety dark stairway and found the boot, without the pearl in it, lying where the sheik had dropped it. Joe pulled it on, and sighed with satisfaction.

"Walkin' around among these 'ere Arabs wi' bare feet gives a bloke the creeps," he volunteered. "I likes to 'ave both boots on, so's to kick 'em with."

"Same 'ere," said Curley. "Now, Joe, see if the ladder's there yet."

It had been pulled up, but it lay coiled beside the parapet.

"Are we goin' back that way an' leave this place unwatched?"

"You are," said Curley. "I stops 'ere."

"Aw, quit kiddin'. D'yer think I'd leave you 'ere alone?"

"One of us 'as got to go an' warn the ship; an' it ain't me."

"Can't we signal 'em? Loose off one o' them rifles?"

"Sure. And 'ave the 'ole bleedin' wasp's nest about our ears. That's a fine idea, that is! Go on. Down ye get. Then tuck yer twopenny down, and run like the dooce for the shore. It must be after ten by now; the boat ought to be there waitin' for us, an' the bosun madder'n a red bull."

"Not me!" said Joe. "I ain't goin' to leave you 'ere alone."

"Bah! You're afraid to go."

"All right. Say I'm afraid if you like.

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Or say, if you like, as I likes yer, an' won't leave yer to it. Suit yerself. I ain't goin'."

Curley pocketed the pistol and brought both hands to his sides.

"I'm senior to you," he grinned. "'T'shun! Right about turn. Forward! Down the ladder, and then run for the boat. 'Urry now!"

"You don't mean it?"

"Mean it? Them's orders! I'll 'ave you up for mut'ny, sure as you're alive, if you don't 'urry. Go along now; down ye get!"

Joe, grumbling and doubtful of results, had been gone ten minutes, and Curley, regretting only that he had no matches for his pipe, was sitting comfortably on the curled-up ladder, when a knock came on the door below. He peered over the parapet and answered it.

"Halt! 'Oo goes there?" he queried.

An Arab mumbled something, stared up at him for half a minute, and departed, with measured Arab dignity. And once more Curley settled down to watch.

Presently, he saw about a dozen white-robed figures, peering at him from the cover of the neighboring shadows; and then heads appeared along the nearest roof, not more than two hundred yards away; and beside the heads were rifles. "This is gettin' O-T warm," thought Curley. And as he made the remark out aloud to himself a bullet whined and pinged against the parapet behind him.

IV

THE *Agamemnon's* cutter lay offshore in the rising swell, her oars dipping in the water every now and then, like a water-spider's legs to keep her in station; and on shore the bosun stood with arms folded, chewing tobacco irascibly and listening hard.

"Two short!" he growled. "What in torment did the old man let 'em go ashore at all for? They'll be in trouble, them two, blast 'em."

Suddenly his ears gave that involuntary jerk that man inherits from primeval ancestors, and he leaned forward.

"Stand by!" he roared. "Bring her in closer."

He had heard the sound of footsteps running toward him, and he wanted the cutter nearer, to jump for his own life in case of need.

The footsteps came nearer; they seemed to stagger, like a drunken man's.

"Ugh! Palm-toddy!" growled the bosun. "Trust a British seaman to find booze in the Sahara itself."

A white-clothed figure reeled into the moonlight, hatless and brandishing a knife. The bosun could hear his heavy breathing long before he recognized the man.

"'E'll have the rats for a week," he growled, getting ready for energetic measures of repression.

Joe Bing staggered toward him, still brandishing the knife and trying hard to speak. Out shot the bosun's fist, and down went Joe, spluttering frantically on the beach; and the boat's crew laughed in appreciation of his neatness.

"Come on," he shouted. "Bring her in. Throw 'im in and pull off again while I wait 'ere for the other."

So the spluttering and expostulating Joe was turned face downward, and ignominiously frog-marched to the boat.

"Blackbirds!" he contrived to mumble, between his gasps for breath. "Curley ain't comin'."

"Hurry up," ordered the bosun. "Chuck 'im in the boat and pull out again."

"E's talkin' about blackbirds," said an able seaman who had hold of him.

"'E's drunk," said the bosun. "In with him!"

So they pitched him face-downward in the boat, and the shock of landing in it took all his remaining breath away. The boat pulled out, and the bosun cursed and waited.

But down on the bottom of the boat Joe soon began to recover both his wind and his presence of mind; and with the two, his temper rose as well.

"Rip the bower-anchor out o' me!" he shouted, sitting up and grabbing the stroke-oar by the knee. "You're the flea-bittenest bunch o' chuckle-'eads I ever comed across!"

The bow-oar kicked him and sent him once more sprawling on the bottom.

"I tell yer Curley's in a dooce of a mess," he shouted. "I comed to fetch the 'ole bleeding crew, not to watch yer sitting 'ere on yer thwarts like a lot o' sea-cooks. We've found two 'undred blackbirds, all chained up in a hayreme."

"What's that?" shouted the bosun, who had overheard a part of it. "Does he say Curley's in a harem?"

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"'E says there's two 'undred blackbirds in a hayreme."

"There'll be two able seamen in the brig pretty soon after Curley gets back 'ere," said the bosun. "Stop 'is noise, some one. I want to listen."

Some one choked Joe into silence. Once more there was nothing to be heard except the lapping of the oily waves along the beach, and the occasional creaking of the rowlocks as they took a stroke or two to bring the cutter's nose pointing to the shore.

Suddenly a shot rang out; then another one. Joe gave tongue again.

"That's Curley!" he yelled, in an agony of apprehension.

"They're shootin' him! Can't yer listen? 'E's in a 'arum—on the roof—wi' two 'undred blackbirds all chained up underneath!"

"An' pink snakes with yeller stripes on 'em a-crawlin' round 'is legs?" suggested the stroke-oar interestedly.

THREE more shots, spaced at deliberate intervals, rang out through the night, and the bosun seemed to think it was time to make a move.

"Bring her in!" he shouted.

He jumped in and took his place in the stern-sheets.

"Now, boys!" he ordered. "Give way with a will! Back to the ship! If Curley's in a mess we'll need a whole ship's crew to go and fetch him."

On the way back he chose to listen to what Joe Bing had to say; and slowly, by very gradual stages, belief began to dawn on him. The knife alone, with blood crusted on the hilt of it, was circumstantial evidence; and Joe's positive assertions, that cross-examination could not shake, were very little like the ravings of a man in delirium tremens. Moreover, Joe's breath did not smell of drink; the bosun was careful to satisfy himself on that point.

So an irascible commander was hauled out of bed and asked to listen. But he did not listen long. Joe only got as far as "two 'undred blackbirds, sir," when he bellowed:

"Cutter away! Turn out the watch below! All boats away!"

And in less time than it would take to man and start as many fire-engines, five boats, with a lieutenant-commander in pajamas in the last one, were racing neck and neck shoreward.

With Joe Bing leading them they leaped on the shore, bare-footed, in full cry. They swept up the narrow streets and alley-ways with a yell that woke every sleeping echo in Abu Fatera, and sent the Arabs scuttling for cover. And they found Curley Crothers ensconced snugly on the roof, with three unused cartridges left in his revolver, but with his very last chew of twist half-finished.

He could not open the door for them, for it was locked in some extraordinary way that baffled him; so he had to lower the rope-ladder, and they climbed up one by one—commander first.

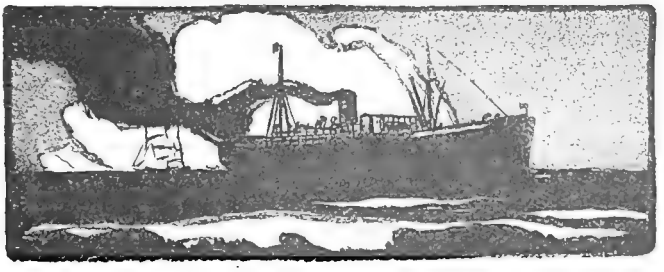
"What's this?" demanded the commander, as he stepped on to the roof.

"Two 'undred an' nineteen slaves, sir, taken ashore," said Curley. "An' all's well."

"All's well," said the commander.

They loosed the slaves, marched them to the ship, took them to Bombay and freed them. In due course of time, with due formality, they sent a requisition to the Admiralty for two thousand and ninety pounds. After due Admiralty deliberation, and signing and countersigning of warrants and vouchers and blue forms, and finally of a check, the sum was paid.

"An' it ain't the coin so much," said Curley to his friend Joe, as they sat and counted out their share of it on board the *Agamemnon* in Bombay; "though that's good, mind yer. An' it ain't our 'avin' observed their bleedin' prejudices so careful. What I likes is disprovin' this 'ere 'arum superstition; there ain't no such bleedin' thing. Me an' you's proved it."



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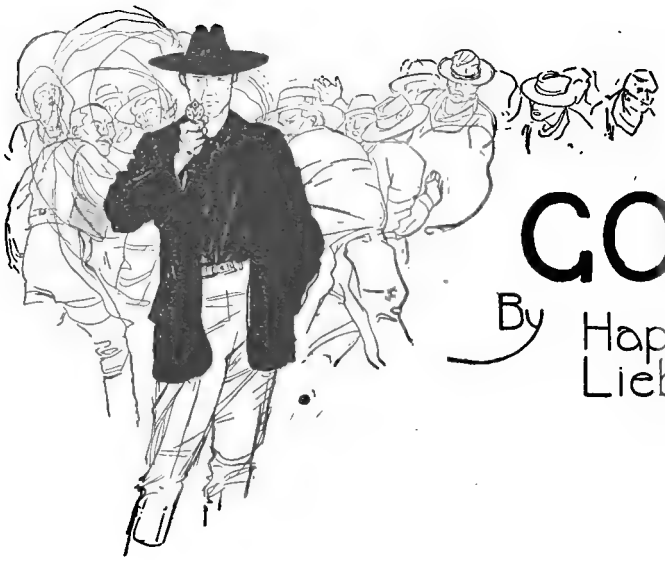

GOLIATH

By Hapsburg Liebe..

FIREPLACE was a new gold-minin' camp then, and so little that the rocky, scrub-covered hills around it seemed to almost smother it. In fact, there was nothin' of it but a few shanties, a little store and a saloon and hotel combined which latter bore the name o' "The Black Fox." The population was strictly male, and was made up of men from the four p'ints o' the compass, and a few Greasers—also we had among us now and then a fellow of the class o' humanity called bad-men, men with no home-State and no past that we knowed anything about, and with no future that was anything like certain.

One evenin', shortly after dark, we was all settin' at the little tables that had been provided in the saloon department o' The Black Fox, some of us playin' poker, others spinnin' yarns and smokin', when there piled down from a newly arrived sorrel hoss in front o' the door the very biggest mortal I ever seen.

He had features that struck me as bein' as mean as pizen itself, from what I could see of 'em. He wore a heavy, burlin', black beard, y' understand. He had on a no-colored slouch-hat turned up in front, a red handkercher around his neck, a dusty blue shirt, two belts o' ca'tridges and two big revolvers, brown corduroy trousers and high boots. He grinned gen'ral-like as he stamped across the floor and brought up at the bar, on which he jammed a fist so big that it shook the whole house and all the glassware it contained.

"Set 'em out for the bunch, barkeep!" he bellows in his deep bass voice, and turns to the crowd, which was busy sizin' him up.

"Line up here, bullies," he says, "and have one on me!"

I was too old a man to be fooled by the smooth manner o' this giant. I felt right from the start that he was as sneakin' as a Gila monster—and the things that happened later proved to me that I was correct in my first impressions.

"Wants to get into the good graces o' the boys," I tells myself, "and then for some devilment."

But I goes on up to the bar and lines up with the rest, jest to be what you'd call a good fellow—and maybe partly because I didn't want to be drawed into a sort o' controversy by refusin'. It was a merry crowd, that bunch o' miners and cowmen; big, rugged, sunburned fellows they was, and

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fun was life to 'em. We raised our glasses, and the closest tipped rims with the big stranger.

"By golly!" bawls the giant, a wide grin separatin' his beard from his mustaches, "I reckon you bullies would like to know whose health you're drinkin' to, wouldn't you?"

He looks down on the Fireplace outfit like he was the only man there, and most of us begun to entertain thoughts o' chasin' him out o' our midst. His manner was so despisable that nobody saw the snaky black o' the eyes he swept us over with.

"I am called Goliath," he says, boastful-like, with an oath to it.

"Here's to the health o' Goliath!" cries out a young fellow from the Middle West, winkin' sly at some o' the rest of us; "and may you never," he says, "meet your David!"

"Here's to the health o' Goliath!" cries the crowd, each man of it winkin' at somebody else.

But Goliath's grin had disappeared with the insinuation in regards to David which had been handed out by the fellow from the Middle West, and a heavy frown took its place. The giant then clapped a hand the size of a picnic-ham on the shoulder o' the Middle Wester, and jerked him around so quick that he lost half o' the fire-water from his glass.

"Don't let any thoughts o' any possible David trouble you, son," he growls in his earthquake voice. "If any David crops up on the scene in connection with me," he says, "that David 'll need the same help the David of old had. Son," he goes on, the words rumblin' out in a way that give me the shivers, "I'm a bad-man—a bad, bad man. I eat rattlers, gilas, and horned toads reg'lar. Broke-up glass and chained lightnin' is what I call a light breakfast."

If it hadn't been for Culverson Bibb, the barkeep, I reckon the Fireplace outfit would 'a' started in right then to hoot Goliath out o' town. Culverson Bibb had a fashion o' readin' all the newspapers he could get his hands on, and he suddenly remembered somethin' he'd read recently.

"Say," he says, leanin' to'ards the big man and seemin' almost out o' breath, "ain't you 'Montana'?"

MONTANA! At the mention o' the name the Fireplace crowd shed its smiles and went a little pale at the gill. The giant's despisable manner had turned to a sort o' wild nobility immediate. All of us had heard o' Montana, the smoothest outlaw alive at the time, who had been operatin' in the State to the north of us. All of us had heard how Montana could draw some quicker'n anybody else, and how he could empty both guns into a cigarette-paper at thirty yards.

I believe that Culverson Bibb was afraid for the safety of us, and wanted us to know that we'd better not start any rough-house with the newcomer.

Goliath—as he'd called hisself last—grinned once more and faced the barkeep.

"What made you think that?" he says, with an oath to it.

"Seen your description in a newspaper—big man with a black beard, which, the paper said, was all the description anybody could get of you," says Bibb, very proud to be the discoverer o' Montana. "Also," he goes on, admirin'-like, "the paper said that nobody even knowed your real name. And that there was a reward of a thousand bucks out for you, alive or dead."

Goliath—the name suits him better'n the other—looked us over.

"Well," says he, with an oath to it, "does anybody here feel that he needs that thousand bucks? If so," says he, "come out with it like a man. If not, don't commit suicide by tryin' sneakin' tricks later. As the sky-pilots says, 'Speak now or forever hold your peace,' bullies."

Everybody could see the snaky black o' the bad-man's eyes now. It wasn't very likely that any of us would attempt to take Goliath for the reward. Oh, no, there wasn't much danger of any of us lookin' with longin' to'ards that round thousand! Nuggets and dust by the sweat of our brows was a sight more pleasant to think about. Goliath was very safe. The sheriff, who lived in Hartsville, the county-seat at the time, and a good many miles away, hadn't as yet found out that Goliath, or Montana. as you please, had emigrated from the State to the north of us.

"I like the reignin' silence," says Goliath. "It sure pleases me. Bullies," he says, "here's to my girl: the girl with the graceful figger of a grasshopper, teeth as white as the bleached bones of a dead dog, nose like the nose of a statue—of a billiken; ears like shells—ostrich-egg shells; voice like the voice of an angel—of darkness. Drink hearty, bullies; drink hearty!"

Maybe that crowd didn't holler! It

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blasted nigh brought the roof o' The Black Fox tumblin' down on its heads. I hollered too, because I was afraid not to. I ain't nobody's coward; but there was somethin' about Goliath, since the name Montana had been applied to him, that made my flesh creep and pine to flee from the tomb, so to speak.

The proprietor o' the saloon, through a strange charity that wasn't hard to account for, set the house up to cigars. Everybody and his brother lit up; and then Goliath jerked his right-hand gun and shot the cork out of a bottle without touchin' glass, jest to show us that he was no bum shot, and also to sort o' blend the reekin' odor o' burnin' scrap-tobacco with the pungent smell o' powder-smoke. After that, Goliath sung a song the theme o' which was a million miles from bein' on the same order as the fav'rite anthem of our Middle Wester, "Ah, I Have Sighed to Rest Me!" and rode off into the scrub-covered hills through a storm o' blazes from his own two .45's.

But I knowed right then that we hadn't seen the last o' Goliath.

Well, all but me and another old man, Fireplace went to talkin' admirin'-like about the big stranger as soon as his shootin' had died away. I reckon he was their ideal of a bad-man—dashin', bold, gen'rous, and all o' that; the very feller to happen along at jest the right time and lend much-needed assistance to poor widders and orphants, y' understand. I listened to it all and smiled, and I said to myself that when them there young bucks had seen as much o' life as I had, they'd hesitate before goin' into raptures over strange bad-men. I ain't sayin', of course, that there ain't no good bad-men.

The other old man that I mentioned, as I insinuated before, agreed with me in my regards concernin' Goliath. This old miner was named Gaydon, and he was from the far-away State o' Tennessee. He was very thin and stooped, and his hair and beard was turnin' white so fast that it was pitiful. He lived by hisself in a little shanty up in the hills from the reg'lar camp; and from the first claim-stakin' that Fireplace had ever had, he had worked like a Turk and saved his money like a miser ag'inst his swift-comin' old age.

It had been touchin' to us all, how old Ben Gaydon had starved hisself in order to lay by somethin' for the totterin' days. The only luxury he 'lowed hisself was tobacco for his pipe. He had stepped into The Black Fox for a fresh bag jest before the comin' o' Goliath.

"Well, Ben," says I to Gaydon, in a whisper, "I'd advise you to keep a close watch over them savin's o' yours."

You see, I was right chummy with him, us two bein' old fellows alone amongst the young bucks.

"I'd jest formed that there very res'lution, friend Bill," says he to me. "Goliath is a varmint, Bill," says he, "and no mistake."

And that same night he dug a hole in the ground, in one corner o' his one room, and hid his dust, nuggets, and money.

I SAID we'd see more o' Goliath, and we sure did. The next evenin' he rode into Fireplace, hitched his hoss in front o' the saloon and marched hisself in with a manner that kings and emp'rors would give many years o' their lives to p'ssess. As before, he called a line-up at the bar; and as before the boys all drunk to the health o' Goliath, while the giant hisself drunk to the health o' that there strange woman-crittur whose physical attainments he'd described on the first night of his advent in Fireplace.

He was sure on a throne. Everybody looked up to him, laughed at his sayin's, bragged about him to his face. And the giant he'd strut around among us and jut out his bearded jaw like he was sp'ilin' for a fight and say, "I'm Goliath!" with a hair-raisin' oath to it.

And my friend old Ben Gaydon from Tennessee whispered to me and told me that he knowed of a man named David—which struck me as bein' sort o' peculiar at the time; although I found out in less'n a month what he meant by it.

Ten days passed by, and in that short time Goliath had won at the little tables in the saloon about all the spare funds that Fireplace had—with the exceptions o' the savin's o' old Ben Gaydon. And the young bucks felt Goliath's bluff so hard that they parted with their gold and money with flow'ry smiles. It was worth a good deal, I reckon, to be able to remember that they had actually set down at a table and played poker with the notorious Montana.

Of course Goliath had found out through some o' the sweet and confidin' natures o'

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the younger element that old Ben Gaydon had worlds o' gold, and money in the finished state, saved up. And of course when Goliath had fished the pockets o' the younger element dry, he turned his attentions to'ards old Gaydon. But you couldn't 'a' made them admirers o' his believe that there was anything that dirty in his bold, dashin', wildly noble nature—not a bit of it.

AND this is what happened to the poor old man from the far-away State o' Tennessee:

Gaydon had set up late, as he was a great reader, and had a few books in his shanty. Jest as he was in the act o' takin' off his glasses preparatory to dousin' the candle and hittin' the hay, he thought he heard the sound of a hoss's foot collidin' with a rock up on the hillside above; and, wonderin' who it could be that was out and ridin' around at that late hour, he goes to the door and opens it, lookin' out into the blackness. All was as still as death. Gaydon suddenly felt afraid, happenin' to think o' the bad-man, and shet the door.

And in another minute there comes a soft knock. Gaydon picks up a very old navy-pistol and cocks it.

"Who's there?" he says.

"It's me—Bill Lockwood," says that low-down Goliath, usin' my name as a decoy.

And it worked. Gaydon couldn't hear very good; and then I reckon Goliath had imitated my voice a little. Gaydon throws down his gun and opens the door with a smile o' relief.

"Why, Bill," says he, "what in the name o' Sam Hill——"

Goliath leaped into the shanty, grabbed poor Gaydon and throwed him hard to the ground, holdin' one big hand on the old man's throat, ready to shet off his breathin'.

"I want your savin's," Goliath says, his voice as gruff as a bear's. "I'll have 'em in the end; so you might as well come clean on the start and save yourself some trouble."

"I—I won't give 'em to you—I say I won't!" says Gaydon, hoarse and pantin'. He struggled, but he was as helpless in the giant's hands as a sixty-minute-old baby would 'a' be'n.

The robber tightened his big fingers around the old man's throat, and his hairy face looked like a devil's as he glared down with his snaky black eyes shinin' like transported bits o' fire in the dull glow o' the tallow candle.

"I'm Goliath," he grinds out o' the drawed-down corners of his mouth.

"Surely," Gaydon gasps, "you—you wouldn't rob a poor old man——"

The giant gripped his fingers harder on the almost white beard and the thin throat underneath of it. A sparklin' light flashed before Ben Gaydon't eyes, then a thousand sparklin' lights, then he felt like he was fallin' into a star-spangled pit with no bottom. He suddenly re'lized that he was on the brink o bein' strangled at the hands o' the bad-man, the varmint, the flesh-eatin' kyote that Goliath was!

Goliath lets up to see if the victim of his brute force will tell where his savin's is at.

And Gaydon told, for he believed that one more chokin' would kill him. He was somewhat feeble anyway, y' understand. Goliath took care to take Gaydon's pistol and throw it out at the open door. Then he dug down into the ground in one corner o' the shanty and got the money and the raw gold, droppin' it inside o' his blue shirt. As he reached the door on his way back to his hoss, he turned to the figger o' the old man.

"I'm done here now," he says. "I've cleaned up all I can get here. And you can tell them there nice little Sunday-school boys down there at the camp," he sneers, "that if they try to follow me on account o' me robbin' you, that I'll kill every one of 'em. Ask 'em if Montana ever let anybody bother him when he didn't want to be bothered! Ask 'em, blast their hides, if Montana cain't shoot down a hangin' hoss-hair in the dark! I'm the king-bee o' bad-men—I'm Goliath. Understand me, I'm Goliath!"

He started. Old Gaydon raised up, shakin' all over, his head throbbin' like it would bust and his eyes still seein' flashin' lights. And as the robber went off, he heard Ben Gaydon, the man from the far-away State o' Tennessee, say in a strange voice:

"You may be Goliath. . . . You *are* Goliath. . . . But I've got a son named David."

The giant got on his hoss and rode away, goin' to'ards another little minin'-camp. But he couldn't entirely forget what old Gaydon had said:

"I've got a son named David!"

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A FEW weeks later, there blowed into Hartsville, the county-seat, a rank stranger to everybody there. He was tall and somewhat lanky, pale, smooth-faced, and young-like. He wore a new broad, black hat, a new, shiny sateen shirt, a new black suit o' clothes and a new pair o' high boots. A prominence under the right hand side of his coat said that he also wore a .45. He walked straight for the door that had the sheriff's sign on it, and rapped. Sheriff Burns opened the door. The stranger walked into the office o' the officer, and begun to eye Burns with a pair o' the keenest, soberest gray eyes that Burns had ever seen.

"I understand," says this newcomer, "that you've got a bad-man in this neck o' the woods named Montana—or, as he later calls hisself, Goliath—and that there's a big reward out for him. What about it?"

Sheriff Burns had found out about our outlaw shortly after the outlaw had treated Ben Gaydon so low-down brutish, and he'd been doin' some hard but unavailin' ridin' in the attempt to locate him, for Burns was about as fo'midable a character in the gun-play line as Goliath hisself.

"Why, yes," says the sheriff, impressed with the stranger's manner, "Why, yes," says he, "we've got such a man, and there's a reward of a thousand bucks out for him, dead or alive—preferably," he says, "the former. Who are you, friend, and what do you want with Goliath?"

"I'm David," says the stranger, his pale face hardenin'.

"Well, blast the pizen hide o' me!" exclaims the officer, understandin' what the stranger is drivin' at. "David after Goliath, eh? Well," says he, "can I help you any?"

"You sure can," says David. "I want you to make me a deputy sheriff, so I can go after him in a legal way. I've never killed a man; and if I had to kill this Goliath—or Montana, whichever you please to call him—it would seem better afterward to know that I done it as an officer o' the law."

Sheriff Burns was only too glad to do it.

"Why, yes," he says, "I reckon I can fix you."

David bought a hoss, took a couple o' canteens o' water and some desert-grub and set out for Fireplace. And as soon as he'd got out o' sight o' Hartsville, he took from his pocket a pair o' handcuffs Burns had give him and throwed 'em into a clump o' scrub.

It was an hour after dark when he rode his lathered hoss up before the main industry of Fireplace and slid to the ground. Old Gaydon and me was settin' at a little table in one corner o' the saloon department; and Gaydon, broke at the heart, had his head hid in his hands, with his elbows on the table before him. The strange, young-like man with the smooth, pale face walked in and give one sweepin' glance that took in everybody in the room. And his gun was half-way out o' the holster, too.

"Has anybody here seen Goliath lately?" he says in a voice that made me think o' the ring o' hard steel.

"Not since he robbed old man Gaydon," answers the proprietor o' The Black Fox. "Who might you be, friend?"

"I'm David," says the new arrival.

Ben Gaydon had raised his head at the sound of his son's voice. He went to his feet, and them two got together and shook hands so hearty that I jest had to wipe at my blasted old eyes. Mother-love—it ain't no better than father-love, much as it's ranted about in po'try and books. Old Gaydon then interduced us all to his son David, from the far-away State o' Tennessee, and seemed as proud of his boy as if that boy had been a solid nugget o' pure gold from top to toe. And I couldn't find it nowhere in me to blame him. Anybody'd 'a' been proud of a son like David.

Well, David didn't have much to work on, as far as a trail was concerned. Goliath had been gone several weeks, you see, and there was nothin' to do but to visit minin'-camps until he found the big Philistine.

As soon as he'd got a night's sleep, he looked to his grub and water, got the best bearin's he could get, and rode off into the lonesome hills. His father was dead set on goin' with him. But the poor old fellow was mighty weak since his treatment at the hands o' Goliath, and David wouldn't hear to it. Besides, David looked for trouble, and he didn't want his father in any danger.

ONE day later David come to a wild camp knowed as Weyman's Gulch; and there he found without askin' that Goliath had departed shortly before, after havin' cleaned up everybody with his sleight-o'-hand poker-tricks. Go-

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liath, they said, had rode in the direction o' Hill Creek, which was yet wilder than Weyman's Gulch, and which laid straight to the south. David rested for a few minutes, and then headed his hoss to'ards Hill Creek. But, although he rode as fast as his hoss could stand to go, he didn't catch up with Goliath on the two-days' journey.

It was good sundown when he arrived at the saloon and hotel combined which was the principal thing in Hill Creek. He left his hoss standin' at one end o' the buildin', and then strolled into The Gold Mule as easy as if he was the oldest inhabitant o' the camp. Nobody noticed him, for the very plain reason that Goliath was standin' at the bar and gettin' the attentions o' the whole bunch, who held brimmin' glasses in their hands.

"Drink to the health of Goliath!" bawled the giant, in his despisable and braggin' way, his own glass held high.

The crowd o' miners winked at one another and drunk. After this there followed a gen'ral puncturin' o' the ceilin', accompanied with clouds o' spark-stabbed powder-smoke, which was to show the top-heavy big fellow that they could be jest as wicked as anybody else. Then some young miner who had read all the newspapers chance throwed his way looked to'ards the giant and remarked:

"Say, you ain't that man Montana, are you?"

"I was," is the answer; "but now I'm Goliath. I like the name better. Yes," he says, with an oath to it, "I'm Goliath, the king o' good fellows — and bad fellows too."

Jest as the Fireplace and Weyman's Gulch crowds lost their smiles at the name o' Montana, jest so did this bunch lose its smiles at the same name. In the passin' of a single minute Goliath was enjoyin' all the adulation comin' to a bold, dashin', wildly noble man. Then Goliath happens to see the pale, smooth-faced stranger, who stands in the middle o' the saloon-floor, his eyes as hard as drill-p'ints and his jaw-muscles not much softer. The big man juts out his bearded jaw to'ards old Gaydon's son, and says out o' the drawed-down corners of his mouth:

"You boob," with an oath to it, "what're you gazin' at me for? I'm Goliath!"

As quick as lightnin' the pale stranger yanked a big, blue .45 from its holster, and trained it at the heart o' the giant. In fact, it had been done so all-fired quick that Goliath hadn't even tried to draw one of his own guns before he was covered.

And Goliath seen that the hammer o' the big, blue revolver was standin' on a dead center, and therefore ready to fall at the least bit o' nervousness.

"I'm David," says the pale, smooth-faced man, and without any oath to it.

The crowd knowed that it was a strictly business-matter, because any man who had the nerve to draw a gun on the notorious Montana was bound to be a man who never drawed for a bluff in such a time as that. There was soon a free shootin'-space cleared. Come a few seconds o' heavy silence, with the onlookers expectin' to witness the passin' of a mortal or two across the Great Divide. Then, still standin' like a figger cut out o' solid rock, David begun to speak in tones that was as soft as the purrin' of a panther-kitten, and yet as cold as ice.

"I'M DAVID GAYDON," he says, "the son of the poor old man you mighty near choked to death and robbed of his hard-earned savin's of many long months. I'm also a deputy sheriff, and I can kill you if I see fit—and it wouldn't matter if I did, for the world needs to be rid of such scum as you. I'll now trouble you for three thousand dollars, the amount, as near as can be guessed, which you took from my father."

Goliath's hands shook as he worked 'em into the bosom of his shirt. He pulled out two bunches o' paper money, and held 'em to'ards David. David called to a bystander to take the money and count it. It was but two thousand dollars, and it was all the money Goliath had.

"One thousand yet," says David, addin', "but the reward that's out for Montana will make it up."

"But—but——" Goliath begins, when David elevates his cocked and ready shooter one inch and cries:

"Hush!"

Goliath finished, turnin' yaller to the core of him. His jaw hung down and quivered. His snaky black eyes stuck out, seemin' like they was on stems, like a snail's. His face, what could be seen of it for the burlin', black beard that was on it, went a shade

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past the color o' wood-ashes. He was starin' certain death in the face, and he knowed it—and he also knowed that he deserved it.

"Get down on your knees," orders David, without any oath to it.

Goliath, whimperin' like a whipped child, obeyed.

"Now pray," says David. "Of course your stripe don't know any prayers, so say this after me: *'Our Father Which art in Heaven——'*"

Then followed the rest o' that beautiful prayer.

And Goliath went through it with tears streamin' from his eyes, the first and the last prayer of his life—for the "amen" was the signal for David to send a slug o' .45 lead through Goliath's heart.

David then got proof that he'd killed Montana, took it to Hartsville, and got the reward-money. This, of course, made old Gaydon's three thousand up, and old Gaydon sure got it. A few days later, the two Gaydons hit the road for far-away Tennessee, meanin' to spend the rest o' their lives in a more peaceable community than Western minin'-camps.

And although David somewhat regretted killin' the bad-man, he was glad o' the chance to leave off his life as an outlaw. For, before shavin' off his black beard and mustaches, David hisself had been Montana.

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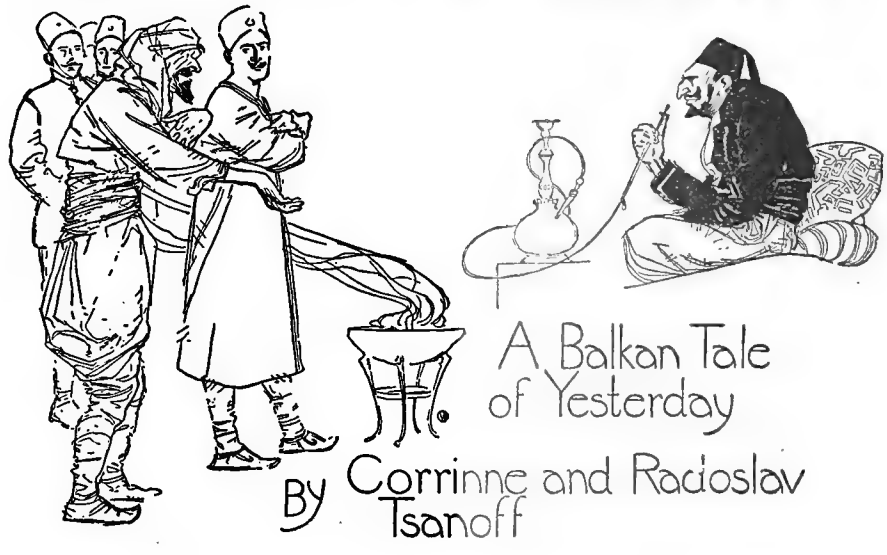

A Balkan Tale of Yesterday

By Corrinne and Radoslav Tsanoff

CHAPTER I

IN THE TWO-LEGGED HOUSE ON THE RIVER

SHAPED like the two legs of a right triangle, the house presented an almost windowless back to the street, ugly, uninviting. Through a heavy door, built under an archway of stone, one entered into an inside court on which all the windows of the house opened. A balcony ran the entire length of the second floor, throwing the interior into comparative shadow.

The two legs of the house waded clear into the Ladna River—a solid stone wall twelve feet high, built right in the water. Pieces of broken glass and jagged bottles projected forbiddingly from the mortar which held them secure, and made approach from the river a venturesome undertaking.

The rooms on the upper floor, connecting

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with one another throughout, ended in a brightly lighted studio that looked up and down the river and over to the opposite bank, where the newer portions of the town of Goreno climbed a steeply ascending slope to the Pirin Mountains of northern Macedonia, a long chain of riotous Autumn color, topped with the elusive blue of a cloudless sky-line.

Palettes and unwashed paint-brushes and an unfinished canvas or two mingled with photographic plates and cameras of various sizes. Utter artistic disorder pervaded the room. The walls were lined with paintings, obviously original and mostly of an allegorical character: Balkan maidens with rosy cheeks, carmine lips and night-black eyes shot adoring glances at trumpeting cherubim that seemed to rain down from heaven. Saints of both sexes and of all varieties rubbed elbows with classic Venuses in every manner of demure undress. Lions rampant surrounded a golden throne on which a fantastic crown, brilliant with apocalyptic gems, reposed expectantly. A whole side of the room was devoted to a battle-canvas in which Turkish fezes and Balkan sheepskin *kalpaks* (caps) mixed in the general mêlée. Above the smoke-turmoil, eagles and rooks floated ominously, and the pious gold of a monastery-cross glowed in the background.

Altogether, it was a room that whispered, if not of past, then of future mysteries.

ABOUT sundown, a boy's figure crept noiselessly into the studio. He opened a closet and got inside, but found it too narrow to be a comfortable hiding-place. For a while he stood undecided; then, with a sudden impulse, he rushed to the wide, wooden divan in the adjoining alcove that served as a bedroom, pulled off a blanket and removed a cushion, rearranging the rest so as to avoid detection, shoved aside the sliding panels of the divan, threw cushion and blanket underneath and crawled in after them. A couple of noisy minutes followed while the lad was getting comfortably established. Then the panels closed together, and the clock ticked on undisturbed as before.

The twelve-year-old Mirko had done messenger-duty for his brother Dobry, the iconograph, or painter of religious pictures, too often not to have his curiosity whetted. On several occasions the same half-dozen men, invited to the studio, had stayed so late that he had always dropped off to sleep before he heard Dobry slam and bolt the iron gate.

And almost every time these men had come, there had been some out-of-town man to speak to them—and a stranger lot of strangers Mirko had never seen. They had given him hours of futile speculation. The American missionary, for instance, who had come to preach salvation to the studio-crowd the last time they met, left the house the morning following the meeting, dressed, not in his missionary bought-in-the-city costume, but in the short jacket and baggy pantaloon garb of a mountain wood-cutter, with an ax over his shoulder!

And this same afternoon, when he had peeped through the keyhole, he had seen a beardless young monk, in hood and cassock, polishing a murderous-looking dagger. What sort of a monk was this? A monk could pray and anathematize, but he wouldn't need to carry daggers. God would take care of him. To ask Dobry about it was out of the question. Mirko had decided to investigate directly, by inviting himself to this meeting.

The boy waited in the darkness for a while. Then, with a new idea, he crept quietly to the edge of the divan and pushed the sliding front-board a couple of finger-breadths. Surely no one could notice the difference from the outside, but it made all the difference in the world to him. He could hear the clock ticking away and, by applying his eye to the crevice, he had a fair view of the studio beyond the partition.

He settled back on the blanket-cushion to rest. He had had to hurry in order to carry his brother's message to all the guests and still be on hand early enough to put in practise his own eavésdropping scheme. To his Aunt Zora, who kept house for him and Dobry, he had mentioned going to the grandmother's overnight.

Mirko stretched his legs comfortably, grinning with expectation. To-night he'd know about *them*, who and what they were really after, talking all night with American missionaries and daggered monks. He was nervous with the excitement of a greedy curiosity about to be gratified.

But he had done some running out in the late Autumn afternoon. The room was warm, and he felt so cozy lying on his back with the heavy blanket about him! He

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found himself yawning. His eyes blinked, closed.

There seemed to be a quarrel between the monk and the missionary. The American wanted Dobry to paint an icon, not with real paint, but with Mirko's own blood, so as to make it powerful for life or death. But the young, beardless monk shook his dagger-handle and said no. Red paint was every bit as good, and anyhow, he didn't believe in killing little fellows for the sake of the holiest icon of the holy.

He even threatened to throw the American out of the window. But the American made for Mirko and was just about to hammer his head on the anvil in the blacksmith's shop when——

"WHAT was that? Didn't you hear?" It was the monk's voice. In a twinkle Mirko was wide-awake, and silent as death.

"Oh, some mouse a-scratching," Mirko heard his brother assure the guests. "Go on with what you were saying, Stoyan."

The boy dared not look through the crevice or make a single motion, but he could hear plainly.

"Well," Stoyan the chandler was speaking, "late last night Selim, Murad Pasha's son, together with another Turk, broke into Zasho Doeff's house—above the Twisty Hollow, you know—pulled him out of bed, and wanted him to roast a lamb for them right then and there. Zasho began to cross himself in holy terror. Roast a lamb with no fire in the oven! Why, it was plain they were trying to pick a quarrel, or something worse.

"They showed their teeth soon enough. Said a rooster would do perhaps, but in that case it must be cooked right. They had heard Kalena, his young daughter, was expert at such things. She must do it for them.

"Zasho pleaded with them not to frighten his child; offered them his best ox for nothing if they'd only go and leave him in peace. But they hanged him, sandals up, to the cross-beam, raked up the fire, and started pounding at the women's door."

"The dirty boars!" Dobry interrupted.

"All this while," Stoyan continued, "Zasho was yelling like mad. They were so drunk they hadn't thought of gagging him. A passing shepherd rushed in to see what was the matter. They hanged him head-down too.

"The rascals battered at the door till it gave in, but when they rushed ahead the bedroom was empty. Kalena and the mother had escaped through the window and run in dead night all the way down to the huts by the Twisty Hollow. Half a dozen men came to Zasho's help, but found only the two poor souls still hanging, unconscious. Zasho came to, but there is no telling whether the shepherd will survive.

"They rode in on Zasho's two horses, and Selim has been boasting up and down town that he'd have Zasho's plump partridge daughter yet! Murad Pasha pretends not to know anything about the matter."

"Do you call this life, comrades? I call it a donkey's existence!" Dobry pounded his fist on the table to accentuate his words. "What are we to do, your Holiness?"

"Oh, talk about it, I suppose," the monk laughed bitterly. "Grow indignant. Write a letter to the Holy Exarch at Constantinople. But don't do anything, friends; and so your children and your children's children will live and die just like you."

"But, your Holiness, what are we to do?" Croom the carpenter was speaking. "We haven't rifles enough to go round, and as for ammunition——"

"That is just why his Holiness is here, Croom," Dobry declared. "His Holiness, as you know, is raising money to buy candles for the Monastery of Saint Boom-Boom the Thunderbolter and his pilgrims. I've ordered for myself two Mannlicher candlesticks and five hundred of those candles that are going to singe the life out of some pasha's rascal brood, or my hand is good for nothing but paint-brushes."

"Wish I were a moneyed icon-painter like you," Croom sighed. "All I have is fifty piasters and that will have to go for the harem-tax next Monday."

"What harem-tax?" the monk queried.

"Don't you know?"

Mirko turned to the crevice and looked out. It was Ivan Tosheff, the hunter of Pirin Mountain. He was seated on a three-legged stool at the end of the room, and in the dim light he looked larger and more ferocious than ever.

"Didn't Dobry tell you? This part of the country is to send two hundred thousand piasters' worth of taxes to Uskub before the end of the month. This is our regular assessment. In addition to this, Murad Pasha is levying a special tax of the

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same amount to build him a new Summer harem on Bistra Lake. As if his old one across the river isn't enough! The old vulture must have a harem everywhere he lights!"

"How do you know about the despatch of that two hundred thousand this month?"

"I don't know for sure, your Holiness," Ivan answered, "but that is what I gathered from a remark of Selim's this morning at Stati's Inn."

"Two hundred thousand piasters would buy a lot of candlesticks and no end of candles, no end," the monk mused aloud.

"All it will buy for me will be a dozen kicks for not driving fast enough to suit the dirty hogs," Gani the teamster muttered.

"THEY always have you drive the tax-money wagon, Gani?" the monk asked.

"Well, always for the last eight years, that is," Gani replied. "When they're ready to start, they call me to the *konak* stalls, and off we go. I never know in advance when the wagon is to start or which road we are to follow. That is their precaution against brigands. Selim says he trusts the reins in my hands but not the tongue in my mouth."

"What do you get out of your three days' drive to Uskub?"

"I get out alive usually," and Gani finished with some choice Balkan profanities. "That is all I ever will get, your Holiness. But you have been about more than we poor Goreno devils. Tell us. When are we going to settle with these blood-suckers? When is the fight to begin?"

"I've heard," Croom volunteered, "that next Good Friday night a ball of fire will shoot up the sky and put the very stars out. Then when it gets right over Goreno, it will burst and change into a man with a bugle in his hand. When the bugle sounds, the empire of the Sultan will be no more."

"No, you haven't got it straight," Uncle Dimo's voice came from the opposite corner of the room. Uncle Dimo sold olive-oil and was very wise. "It will be a maid and not a man, and she will have a cross in one hand and a sword in the other. Isn't that it, your Holiness?"

"The Turk will go when you chase him out, comrades, and no sooner," the monk declared emphatically. "It depends on you alone. Bulgarian blood must drown the tyrants. No sky-maiden's sword will save you. When you come to fight the Turk, you need a few more rifles and a caldron full of lead."

"Two hundred thousand piasters!" Dobry repeated.

They were evidently one and all thinking of the same thing, but no one would venture to plunge into the matter first.

"Whichever road you take, Gani," the monk continued, "isn't there one place you must cross to get from Goreno to Uskub?"

"So there is," Gani answered. "Through the Krividol Gulch, every time."

"It is a pretty desert region, isn't it, Gani?"

"Gives me the creeps, it does, your Holiness, when I see those rocks overhead to the right, and the mad river down the gulch to the left."

"One man with a gun in ambush behind those rocks could easily hold half a dozen at bay, couldn't he, Gani?"

"Your Holiness!" Ivan cried out, but checked himself and listened on.

Mirko saw Zary the cobbler jump from his chair, rush across the room, and grab the monk's hand.

"Beg your pardon if I'm rude, your Holiness, but I'm with you, any morning or night or noonday you give the sign."

The cobbler crossed himself religiously and took his seat again.

"Take six men well-armed, Gani," the monk continued, "or a dozen, let us say—what would happen to the Turkish guards?"

"Nothing would happen to the half-dozen, I know," Gani laughed. "I see whither you are blowing, your Holiness, and if I am driving that wagon——"

"We'll have candlesticks aplenty before we are through," Dobry finished.

Under the divan Mirko trembled with excitement but dared not stir for fear of being discovered.

"Are you sure, your Holiness," Ivan the huntsman now spoke up, "are you sure it is a safe undertaking for the Cause at large?"

"Safe?" the monk answered, "why no, Ivan, it is not safe. But it is necessary. The only danger comes after the deed is done—the danger that some one may blab."

"Goreno men are graves," Dobry assured them.

"It's dead men's tongues we have," Croom echoed. "I am with you any time

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you want me. I have a sister's wrong to avenge."

"Count me in too!" Stoyan the chandler added.

"And me!" Croom's brother Peter finished.

"Well, then, I guess my father up by the Seven Well-springs can be depended on to feed us while we are out in the Gulch," Ivan assured them. "Krividol is not so far from the Seven Well-springs."

Uncle Dimo cleared his throat.

"Children," he said, "it is enough to make me weep with joy to see you so plucky and bold. In my days I did my share. My joints creak like a rickety wagon now, but if you'll take an old bones like me along——" He crossed himself.

"Good for you, uncle," the monk slapped him on the back. "That makes over six, and Gani in the driver's seat is good for another half-dozen. I can bring a handful or two of candles and the rest of the apparatus."

"Most important," Ivan said, "Turkish soldiers' costumes for all of us. You have them up in your monastery, don't you, your Holiness?"

"All you want, Ivan, up to a dozen."

"Well then, friends—" the huntsman rose—"the details you will learn later. But come, your Holiness, and swear the comrades to death-secrecy and good faith. Then we must discuss the affairs of the Goreno organization."

The monk drew near, and Mirko looked at him closely through the crevice. He was so young and beardless, and his eyes burned like fire from the shadow of his hood. From somewhere under his cassock he produced a Testament and laid it on the table. Upon this he put two daggers crossed, and a revolver on top. He raised a cross in his right hand. The men crossed themselves and repeated slowly after him the oath of unsurrendering battle:

"While powder burns and blood doth flow——"

CHAPTER II

THE MONK-MAIDEN ON ALLHALLOWMAS

IT WAS full moon on Allhallowmas, unfailing sign of Winter-long bad luck for Macedonian shepherds. In the scary twilight, the shacks and sheep-sheds atop the pasture lands of the Seven Well-springs loomed indistinct in outline. The lighted windows of Uncle Tosho's hut deepened the enveloping semi-darkness as the eye-glow of the night-owl blackens the shadow that hides the rest of him. Full moon on Allhallowmas; no wonder all cattle were stalled and everything shut and bolted!

In the mud-plastered hut with the lighted windows, the many mouths of Uncle Tosho's household were finishing a late supper of rye bread and sliced onions. To touch meat or milk on Allhallowmas would queer any shepherd's Winter. Green beech-logs and dried cow-manure burned in the fireplace, yielding a light dim but steady. Around the fire the faces stood out clear and distinct from the gloom that wrapped the corners.

"Listen to him, the little scamp!" Mother Yana was chiding a greedy ten-year-old. "Haven't you had enough plum-brew? You'll burst afore morning, sonny, if you don't stop."

"Try some of Manio's mixture on him, Mother," Tosho suggested, whereupon Yana laughed.

"What about Manio's mixture?" several voices asked. Manio was the new night-watchman, a stocky old shepherd and a good enough worker, but greedier than a beggar, and dry as a sponge.

"Why, before that old barrel came to us, he was on the Yellow Pasture sheds across the valley. It was a cattleman from over there told me this story. Manio, I guess, likes plum-brew better than anything else that comes in kettles, and that cattleman is an old hand at brewing the stuff. I've drunk some of his brew; dripped like cream and stuck to my mustache. George, that is the fellow's name, liked it best cold in the morning, so before he'd turn in he'd hang his kettle on a hook outsi le the hut.

"Manio, the old rascal, noticed him do it. One night he waited until George and the rest were all snoring like slaughtered pigs, took the kettle down and loaded up to the nose. Then he poured in some fresh water, stirred it all up and hung the kettle on the hook as before.

"Next morning George imagined the brew didn't taste as thick as usual, but thought no more of it. He brewed him a fresh kettleful that afternoon and made it richer than ever. Manio laughed in his sleeve and tried the same trick again. That

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must have happened several nights running, for finally George caught on. So what do you suppose he did?

"He set the kettle a-boiling, but instead of putting in black plums, he chopped up a lot of tobacco-leaves—that hot, biting kind we cure skeepskins with, and the Tartars smoke. It crackles in their long pipes as a handful of sea-salt does when you throw it in the fire. George mixed that with a lot of chimney-soot to give it color, spiced and seasoned it with a bunch of white wool scissored fine and with crushed Albanian peppers, and let the whole thing simmer for a couple of hours, so that all the poison and bitterness came out and made the juice fit to kill at sight. Then he hung it on the hook as usual.

"That happened to be a right busy night for Manio. A couple of sheep had strayed and he had been chasing them all over the mountain since sundown. Long after midnight he came, tired and thirsty as a dog. He listened a while to make sure every one was asleep. George snored away in great style. Manio took the kettle down and, thirsty as he was, must have gulped down half an *oke*-measure at least before he realized he was drinking fire-poison.

"The next day he couldn't drag himself a step. George even thought he'd have to call Priest Azarias, but the rascal survived. He couldn't stand the Yellow Pasture men's gibes though, so he came over here. I haven't noticed our plum-brew getting thinner either."

"That's a nasty Turk's trick, I say," a girl's voice sounded from the other side of the fire.

"What, lassie, filling the fellow full of tobacco-juice and Albanian peppers?" Tosho laughed.

"No, that was clever. I mean drinking up the plum-brew. Only, a Turk wouldn't have poured in fresh water."

THE back door burst open and Manio himself rushed in, shrieking with terror and gesticulating wildly.

"Holy Saint Petka and Saint Nedelia preserve us all! There is a two-headed horse by the sheep-gate, smoking a pipe with one mouth and drinking with the other!"

"By the sheep-gate?" Tosho swore. "That's where I saw you throwing the soap-suds the other day, Yana. I've told you a hundred dozen times: Soap-suds are an invite to goblins and dead men's ghosts and vampires; soap-suds and graveyard willow-twigs and mud from dry wells. We'll be having the spooks set a camp hereabouts if you women don't use your heads."

"Sit down, Manio!" Yana turned to the watchman. Yana was a kind soul. "Sit down and collect your senses, then go and chase the monster off our pastures. Like as not he is across the valley by this time. Ghosts are restless on Allhallowmas."

"It is the full moon does it," Manio reasoned. "It rouses Moslem ghosts as sure as witches' potion. The full moon makes them all a-wander, because no Christian prayers are read for their peace."

After a while he added wisely, "I believe that horse must have been a turncoat Pomak Bulgar. Real Turks always change into hogs."

"Manio, you don't really believe this nonsense, do you?" the girl's voice asked laughingly.

"Believe it, Irina? Why, Deacon Panteleimon heard a priest of the mountain-villages say he had listened to the Abbot of Saint Mitrophan the Stammerer telling the Bishop of Stara Zagora a story handed down by a hermit on his dying bed to the holy monks of Sveta Gora and Hilander. Some peasants had been hunting in the woods where he was—that is, the Abbot; no, I mean the hermit—and killed a boar that was as big as a bull almost. They skinned him in a hurry and speared him over a fire. But the longer the wild hog roasted, the tougher he got. That made the peasants suspicious, so they examined the carcass—and what do you suppose they found?"

Manio's voice grew mysterious. "I am not asking you to believe *me*. It's what the peasants told the holy hermit-man. On one of the boar's hoofs they found a gold seal-ring that was afterward recognized as having belonged to a Turk, Chaush Bey, who had died in the woods not long before. Chaush had torn it from a miller's daughter, who had worn it on a string about her neck as a talisman."

All had been silent while Manio was spinning his yarn. Now that he was through, the ten-year-old nestled closer to his mother and burst out crying.

"Manio, you've found the worst time of the year to be telling scary stories," Mother Yana rebuked him. "Here, have some brew and go back to your watching."

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"Mind you bolt the outer gate tight," Tosho cried after him. "Dead men's ghosts are bad enough if your belly is empty or too full, but it is live ones that lead cattle out of the stalls in the dead of night when the watchmen don't keep their eyes open."

"Here," he called him back. "Have any of those Turkish soldiers been prowling about this evening?"

"Not since those two that came after cheese and bread at sundown. But, Tosho, I can't take my oath on it, yet I think I heard firing somewhere down toward the Krividol Gulch. I can't be sure, but I think I did."

"Bolt the gate and have your rifle ready."

"I wish Ivan were here," the old shepherd continued. "The son should not have gone hunting this time of year and left us alone like this. There are all sorts of rascals abroad, and my arm doesn't hit as hard as it used to. Shut every window tight, Yana, and leave the candle burning. I'll rake up the fire."

MANIO set out in the night, visiting shed after shed. The watch-dogs growled their recognition as he walked past. All of a sudden Manio stopped, transfixed with superstitious fear. This time he could not doubt his vision. Beyond the outermost shed, by the Sweetheart's Well-spring, he could see plainly a real goblin-maiden on horseback, her hair flying in the wind, and her eyes burning like moor-lights. He could hear the impatient tramping of her horse as she brought him quickly to a halt and alighted.

Manio crept noiselessly behind a shed-door and peeped through a crevice, his teeth chattering until he was sure they would betray his presence. What he saw was more marvelous than any Abbot's tale. The goblin-maiden seemed not more than five elbow-lengths away. In the full moonlight her face was the face of a young girl, but white as death. She knelt beside the spring, filled a bucketful and gave her horse a drink; drank herself, patted the horse, filled another bucketful, walked a few steps and sat down on the dewy grass.

Manio noticed that she limped badly. She unwound the sandal-strings, unwrapped her white leggings and began bathing her foot and leg.

The watchman pinched himself to make sure he was not "seeing things." They would never believe him in the morning! They would only laugh at his tale. If only Uncle Tosho were here to see for himself!

From a bag she carried, the maid took out what looked like a jar of something, and for some time rubbed it up and down from her foot to her knee. Then she wrapped the legging about her ankle, tied something very hard above her knee, wound the sandal-strings around, rose and walked gingerly up and down.

She stopped as if to listen. Manio also listened, and seemed to hear the peal of distant thunder. The sky over the mountain was starless now, black with threatening clouds. The air rustled with the chill that goes before a Balkan thunder-storm.

What he saw by the spring, however, made him grit his teeth to keep them from rattling. The shepherd dared not breathe, but silently crossed himself as a saintly hermit does when he sees unsaintly visions. Wonder followed wonder right before his very eyes. The maiden was disrobing.

With all his curious superstition, Manio had the Macedonian peasant's crude modesty, and his eyes closed of themselves—only to open again in fearsome marvel. Where he had seen a goblin-maiden, he now saw a young, beardless monk in cassock, with baggy pantaloons and a heavy waist-band from which protfuded pistols and daggers, and a belt of bullets slung over the shoulder. The brigand, monk, maiden, goblin, or whatever it was, fastened its belt tighter about its waist, and proceeded to put up its hair. Something snapped, and Manio saw a monk's black cap on its head. It went to the spring again, gave its horse another drink, once more looked carefully about, then with one leap was astride and away.

Manio mumbled his prayers and continued to cross himself. He could hear distinctly the sudden storm thundering in the uplands, but he kept staring in the direction where the horse had vanished. The first cold drops on his nose stung him to consciousness, and he hastened to bar and bolt everything and hide under cover.

CHAPTER III

A MATIN INTERRUPTED

IN A HERMIT'S cell up the Great Divide of the Pirin Mountains, where only rooks and eagles abound, above village

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and hamlet and shepherd's hut—as near heaven as a Balkan man can get with his feet still on Mother Earth—Brother Boyan was saying his early matins.

Outside, the forest-clad mountain-land shook and roared with the roar of a Balkan thunder-storm. The morning had changed the black darkness into leaden gray, but the mad elements without lent only peace to the ascetic quiet within. Wax candles nodded before a lithographed Virgin and a wood-carven image of Saint John of Rilo. The young anchorite, clad in a simple brown homespun cassock, bareheaded and barefoot, shivering, chattered his teeth through the order of his discipline, absorbed in self-imposed ordeal and genuflection, utterly oblivious of the raging storm outside.

Brother Boyan was just beginning the Sixth Beatitude of the Holy Virgin, when suddenly he stopped short; listened astonished. Was it the Evil One on Allhallowtide seeking to distract him? He took up his prayer again. No, surely it was a groan, a sobbing human cry he heard. He laid the rosary on the shelf before the icon, stepped to the narrow opening between the rocks that served for an entrance and looked out.

In the foggy gray of the rain-pour he could distinguish a dim shape that looked like a horse. Evidently an exhausted rider. But what could a rider be seeking atop the Divide?

THE hermit returned quickly to the Virgin, crossed himself and kissed the cross, then threw a wheat-sack about his shoulders and rushed out into the storm.

It was a horse, riderless and tramping with fright. Brother Boyan peered about him. Ten feet away he saw a human form crumpled up at the foot of a pine-tree.

"God have mercy on us!" he muttered as he bent over the motionless body.

It was clad in a cassock; the black cap had rolled onto the ground. For a moment the hermit feared he had come too late. But the body shivered as he lifted it in his arms, and, as the head dropped limply on his shoulder, he could feel the faint irregular breathing.

It was a light burden, he thought. As he laid it on the bearskin cover of his simple couch, a mass of dark hair fell over the pillow.

The hermit went to the inside of the cave, returning presently with a flask which he applied to the half-open lips, at the same time unclasping the soaking wet cassock. Beneath the monk's garb Brother Boyan saw what even his eremite eyes could not fail to recognize as a peasant-girl's jacket, in spite of a belt of bullets strapped over the shoulder!

With an ascetic shiver he drew aside. The human shape before him shuddered slightly, as if to rise. Two eyes blinked, opened—the eyes of a woman, and Boyan heard the weak sound of a voice that never came from a monk's throat:

"Did they get away? Dobry, did they?"

The eyes closed again and the girl lay limp on the bed.

Brother Boyan was too good a man to let the sentimental shock of his discovery blind his hermit eyes to the need of immediate help. He applied the flask again to the girl's lips, took off the belt of bullets, loosened her jacket at the neck and undid her hair completely, then wrapped the bearskin and a couple of coarse blankets about the shivering body, and went to the interior of the cell for fire-wood.

He lighted the pile of pine-branches and dry logs with the wax-candle that glimmered before the icon, repeating a prayer while the flames leaped joyously from twig to twig. In a few minutes the dismal cold of the cave had vanished in the bright warmth. Brother Boyan approached the unconscious girl again. Unable to move the couch itself—merely a rock ledge near the wall of the cave—he drew a heavy shepherd's ground-cloth and laid it before the fire. Then he hesitantly turned to the girl; but the ascetic in him was loath to approach her.

"Mother of Jesus!" he whispered, crossed himself before the icon and reverently touched the lithographed sanctity with his lips. Even now he dared not touch the girl. He wrapped the blankets about her, and thus carried her clumsily across the cave and laid her down, face toward the fire.

Brother Boyan was a young hermit. His ascetic fervor was the more ardent because of the unquenched susceptibility of youth. The girl's cold, wet garments were as a mantle of death about her, he knew, and yet he could not summon woman's aid. In front of that fire, he thought, she would soon be dry. He piled wood upon the blazing mass, pushed aside the stone overhead,

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so as to widen the opening that served as a chimney and stood looking at the icon.

Who could tell? Perhaps this was all a testing of him, an anchorite's temptation. He had read of such in the holy books of Saint John of Rilo: of temptresses sent to eremites by the Great Tempter.

He must watch and pray.

He prayed without watching. But the fire-warmed garments steamed up from the prostrate girl. A groan escaped her lips. Accidentally the hermit glanced at his hands. They were blood-stained.

WITH a cry of pity he was at her side. The gray blanket at her feet, he now noticed in the fire-glow, was spotted with blood. The left leg of the baggy pantaloons, which combined strangely in her costume with the peasant-girl's jacket, was soaked with blood, and sticky. She trembled all over as he touched it. There was an ugly bullet-wound on her knee just below the joint.

An ineffective bandage tied in a knot had stopped the blood-flow only partially. Brother Boyan tried to unfasten it, but his hands felt as wooden sticks. At last he took a knife and cut the knot loose. Tearing a towel into strips, he soaked it with whisky and washed the wound clean. The bullet had evidently shot right through, just missing the bone.

With some difficulty he stopped the blood-flow and bandaged the wound as best he could. He wiped the blood from her clothes, noting with satisfaction that they were getting dry, and rubbed her head and hair with a dry cloth. He listened to her breathing. The girl, who had trembled violently while he was cleaning the wound, now lay motionless, fast asleep.

He turned her about with gentle clumsiness, so that her back could dry, took one of the blankets and warmed it before the fire, wrapped her well and put his only pillow under her head. Then, stirring up the fire, he knelt once more before the Virgin, and took up the Sixth Beatitude where he had left off.

Outside the rain poured as madly as ever, but it had stopped thundering. Brother Boyan tried stubbornly to continue his ritual, repeating prayer after prayer, but he found himself listening to his mumbling lips. His mind kept returning to the girl sleeping by the fireside. Matin was impossible.

She was a guest from a world he had scorned and forever abandoned, but she was the messenger of a mystery. Brother Boyan thought he had conquered his senses; his imagination remained, as yawning an abyss as ever. Who was she? What was she? What had brought her to this out-of-the-way cell in the teeth of a Balkan rainstorm, parading in a monk's cassock, brigand's pantaloons and a peasant-girl's jacket? Whose bullet had pierced her knee, and had it been intended for her, and why? Who was Dobry; and who were "they" about whose capture she worried?

All at once he thought of the horse, which he had forgotten completely in his anxiety about her. He snatched the wheat-sack by way of rain-cloak and, forgetting to kiss the icon this time, rushed out into the rain.

He found little trace of it. After some close search, however, he saw horse's hoof-prints leading down the steep path by the gully. He followed for half an hour or more. They ended at a slippery turn on the narrow goat-path. Brother Boyan peered down the gorge, but though he saw every mark of the animal's fall on the sheer bank, he could see nothing at the bottom but the rain-drunken Ladna River roaring down its course, with trees uprooted floating on the crest of the waves. By that time, with such a swift current, the animal's carcass must have reached the valley.

And there was a woman lying wounded in his cave with a badly shot knee, perhaps feverish, half a day's journey from a living soul, separated from a sinful world by a now unfordable, mad current. His wood supply was meager. He must collect more fuel. As he turned back a thousand thoughts and new worries clashed in his mind, and the blinding rain beat upon his wheat-sack and bathed his set face.

CHAPTER IV

TWO VIRGINS

WHEN he returned, she was tossing restlessly in her sleep. The flush of fever burned in her face. It worried the anchorite, but he felt of her garments, and found them quite dry. Doubtless it was the reaction from the night's exposure and the rain and the loss of blood. He mumbled a prayer before Saint John of Rilo's wood-carven image—Saint John himself had the

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fever once—threw a fresh log on the fire, then stepped into the interior of the cave, bringing a basket of not overfresh vegetables, and a small kettle. He filled the kettle with water, hung it on the iron hook over the blaze, and dropped the vegetables into it. Surely a soup would be good for his patient.

The fire crackled merrily. A spark flew out and fell on the coarse blanket. Boyan stooped quickly to brush it off. Her hand lay on the cover and his own touched it for an instant. Was it the fever that made the touch so fiery? The hermit laid his fingers gently on her forehead. It certainly was hot, and the coolness of his hand seemed to soothe her. He remembered a time in his adolescence when a fever was consuming him; how he had craved nothing so much as freezing water.

The spring by the cave flowed down icy-cold. Boyan dipped a gourdful and carried it back to her side. He soaked a towel and laid it over her head. The girl shivered, half opened her eyes, then sank back with a sigh of relief. Presently her tossing ceased, her breathing grew more regular and she dropped into a quiet sleep.

The hermit watched her in silence, cooling the towels from time to time; but she did not waken.

Boyan's massive build breathed unspent animal vigor which ill accorded with the ascetic frame in which it had been encased. The stalwart physique seemed destined to be the flaming torch of an avenging nation, not a living candle of pious devotion. One wondered how prayers and humble supplications could issue from that throat, proud and firm and chiseled out of living rock; how the knees could bend to meditation. His whole being—Herculean frame, wild waving hair dyed in midnight, eyes of untamed fire—proclaimed him a lord of battle. Yet a mantle of humility enveloped the man, and the very strength of him made the hermit more defiantly ascetic as he bent over the sleeping woman, ministering to her needs like the good Samaritan of a Pirin parable.

The odor of scorched vegetables brought him to himself. He sprang up and took the kettle off the fire. She was still sleeping soundly. Surely she needed food more than sleep. He wondered what he could do to waken her. She should be aroused gently in a way not to alarm her.

A quaint thought came into his head. Clearing his throat, the hermit began a low, liturgic chant. The first notes fell strangely out of tune, and he broke off into an uneasy laugh. The presence of another, and that other a woman, made him shy even of his own voice.

A cloud passed over her face, she turned slightly in his direction.

"Don't laugh," she ordered. "I want to sleep," and sank back.

HE STARED at her anxiously. She must be utterly exhausted, and still unconscious of where she was. Her condition moved him to pity. She was helpless. He realized suddenly that she would probably be so for some time. It was long past noon. The sun had just reached the sheer cliffs of Vishny Peak, and the pines on the lower reaches of the mountain threw the valley to the east in the shadow of approaching even.

An unuttered thought it was, or perhaps only a mood, but it shocked the soul of the eremite as his eyes surveyed the bareness of his rocky cell and rested on the woman sleeping before his fire. He crossed himself almost guiltily, his lips murmuring a *"Gospody pomiluy"* (God have mercy on us). He had completely neglected his ritual, but this was no time for devotions. "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these," he kept repeating. The host in him subdued the ascetic. Man or woman, here she was in his cave. He must get things comfortable for the night.

The bald peaks all about him glowed in the mellow sunlight and the woodland rustled contentedly. The clear air set Boyan's blood a-tingle. He wielded his heavy knife lustily. His greedy eyes sought for the softest twigs of balsam and hemlock; and as the fragrant pile at his feet grew, a strange gladness crept within him. The body he had hoped to kill thrilled with a new, joyous life.

The noonday sun had dried the soft pine-branches, but he warmed them before the fire to make sure. The wall of the cave opposite the fire receded into an alcove. Boyan spread his fresh twigs carefully, threw his only sheepskin cover on them and, by way of curtaining off the improvised chamber, he stretched a blanket in front. Then he stood back to admire the effect. The partition was quite successful. As he

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stepped into the alcove and pressed the balsam-couch to test its springiness, his eyes danced with boyish satisfaction.

"OH!"

The exclamation brought him to his feet. He threw back the curtain and stepped out. She was awake at last, intensely awake and staring about her wide-eyed. He tried to speak quietly:

"You have slept long."

Her dark, gray-brown eyes searched his face keenly; she struggled to get to her feet. But a bend of the knee sent a tremor of agony through her. She reeled forward and almost fell into his arms as he sprang to help her.

"Do sit down," he said. "You are weak; you need food."

He swung the long-neglected kettle over the fire, and brought out a loaf of bread and some cheese. When the vegetables once more simmered, he put the kettle between them on a high stone and folded a wheat-sack for her to sit on.

She watched him curiously, questioningly, as he moved about, but neither ventured any conversation. He motioned her to sit down, smiling whimsically at the warmed-over soup.

"This is no sort of dinner for Allhallowtide," he said, "but it is the best I have." Then, as he uncovered the kettle, "The mess has waited long. You were a heavy sleeper."

She sat up with an effort, but without demur, for she was evidently weak with hunger. They ate almost greedily. She could feel strength coming to her with every mouthful.

"Will you tell me, Holy Brother," she turned to him, "when did I come here, and how?"

"You came in the gray dawn," he answered. "How, the Blessed Virgin only knows. Your horse lost his footing on the Ladna cliffs half an hour's distance from here, and fell in the river."

She shuddered.

"And you? And this cave?"

"I am one who seeks peace with God and the lone eagles up here. You are still in this stone cave because there is no help nearer at hand than half a day's journey."

She passed her hand over her forehead.

"I remember climbing and climbing. Then I could ride no more, and the storm beat me from the saddle." She touched her bandaged knee. "You have been very good," she added uncertainly.

He flushed and stammered in embarrassment. "There was no one else here to do it."

She gave him another direct look.

"You *are* very good," she concluded.

ONCE more silence ensued. She bent her head and watched him intently, as though she would read every letter of his thought.

"Tell me; has there been any one else—following—I mean here—looking for me?"

There was more anxiety than eagerness in her voice. All the questions and conjectures of the morning returned to him as he looked at her tense features.

"There has been no one," he answered. "Only the peace of God can draw a man up this goat-path. The road of men is five hours distant down the valley."

"Are you always alone here?"

"Ivan the huntsman is my only guest, and he has not been here these many days."

"Ivan the huntsman? And he is—" she considered a moment, then finished—"the first-born of old Tosho of the Seven Well-springs?"

Her concern astonished him. Who was she? Surely not a village-girl, yet how did she know Ivan, who scorned women and cared only for the rocks and chasms of the Balkan uplands? He nodded in assent:

"He is Tosho's son," he answered. "He used to bring me gifts from the Seven Well-springs, but of late he has forgotten, and I have had to go down to the sheep-sheds myself."

"You—you go to Tosho's for supplies?"

She leaned across the stone table in her eagerness. "Is it far?"

"Three rocky hours down the cliff-trail on a dry day. It is more than a day's journey now."

"Oh!" she almost moaned and sank back wearily, stretching her foot toward the fire.

He waited for her to speak further, but she watched the coals in silence. Night had closed over the mountains. Dark night enveloped them on all sides, save for the drowsy glow of the dying coals on the hearth. At length he rose.

"There is—a bed—of balsam-boughs," he mumbled. "I have curtained it off as best I could."

She looked up and around her. Outside the cave-mouth she could see the blackness

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of the night and hear the moaning of the night wind. A realization of their utter solitude came over her in a flood.

"No, no!" she cried. "I shall stay here in the light. I do not care for sleep."

He flushed again.

"You are weak and need rest," he said in a hurt tone. "You are safe, you need have no fear of me."

He bowed his head and crossed himself reverently.

"I am a man seeking peace with God on high," he insisted.

She struggled to stand, but the hermit looked down and made no offer of help. She limped painfully toward the curtain, and before she pushed it aside turned to him once more.

He looked up. The firelight played on her face, and long, dark tresses fell in disorder over her shoulders. Her eyes smiled frankly across the fire.

"I trust you," the girl said simply; then added, half whimsically:

"You say you are a man seeking peace with God. I am a woman seeking peace for men."

The curtain dropped behind her. Boyan stood motionless, staring at the place where she had disappeared. When he knelt at his devotions before the Holy Virgin, the blue eyes of the image reflected a grayish-brown light that smiled at him with reflected firelight, and puzzling words obstructed the prayer he was repeating, and followed him into his dreams.

CHAPTER V

MIRKO RECONNOITERS

MIRKO had waited in front of the studio until his very teeth chattered with nervous impatience. He could hear his brother's deep breathing, and only the memory of former cudgelings kept him from wakening the sleeper.

The twelve-year-old had been slipping up and down the corridor-balcony all night, it seemed, waiting, waiting, and watching. It was almost gray in the east before Dobry came and, though Mirko tumbled off into a restless sleep after that, he dreamed so vividly that he felt quite as if he had been awake. The first ray of sunlight which shot over his face wakened him crying,

"Dobry, Dobry, they're after me! They're catching up with me, Dobry! I didn't steal anything!"

"The devil's hoofs always leave a trail, sonny!"

Aunt Zora stood in the doorway, pointing an accusing finger at the crums of some sugar-fried wheat-shreds on a chair by the bed.

"Of course you'll have dreams when you steal food like that and gobble it up under your blanket. Out with you now, you little grasshopper, and run to Petko the Baker for the breakfast *simiti* [rolls] or I'll tell Dobry on you."

Mirko rolled out, dressed, and was on the street before his aunt had reached the kitchen. There was a strange stir; people were running here and there or standing in groups at the corners, waving their hands excitedly. For once in his life Mirko had no curiosity, but sped straight for the baker's stand. Turning the corner he ran squarely into a lad of his own age.

"Mirko, Mirkitchko, have you heard?" the boy cried, too excited to resent his tumble. "Think of all that money!"

Mirko's knees almost gave way under him.

"Did they do it really?" he gasped, off his guard. "And wasn't any one hurt?"

"They got away," the boy answered, "and all the Turkish *zaptiehs* [guards] were killed but one."

"Where did you get all this, Snubby-nose?"

"From that longbeard over at the corner. The one guard who got away told the Pasha it was a band of Turkish soldiers who hadn't had any pay that did it. But I don't believe that, even if the Pasha does."

He came nearer, laying his forefinger impressively on Mirko's arm.

"I believe those fellows were real brigands, Mirko, the kind Granny sings about —a whole band of *haiducks*. Say, Mirko, wouldn't it be great to be a *haiduck!* Let's go to the market and hear what they are saying there."

But Mirko curbed his curiosity.

"I daren't," he said. "Got to bring Aunt Zora's rolls. She's mad as seven hens with me now because I hooked her wheat-shreds last night."

And, shaking himself off, he ran at full speed for Petko's shop.

"Your brother is tired and sleepy this morning," his aunt told him when he returned. "Eat your breakfast alone."

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Mirko broke his bread into his red earthen milk-bowl and stirred it up with his wooden spoon, but he could not eat. The moment Aunt Zora left him alone in the room, he tiptoed to the studio and listened intently at Dobry's bedroom-door. He waited for a sign of waking, but his big brother still snored on. How *could* he sleep when all Goreno was agog with the awful news of the robbery in the mountains?

ONCE more Mirko stole along the balcony, through the court, and down the street. He would go to the market and hear what the Pasha really believed. His small body felt almost bursting with the secret he held. And Snubby-nose thought he knew a lot about it, while he, Mirko, had actually heard *them*, seen the young, beardless monk——

The streets were buzzing with excitement just as before, but Mirko noticed that the men he met seemed to be on the lookout for Turkish *zaptiehs*. He heard one of the elder men say that sensible men kept under cover when trouble was abroad.

Still, even fear could not check their curiosity.

"What will Murad Pasha do for his money now?" a graybeard speculated. "Collect our year's taxes yet another time?"

"How can he?" objected a young man just married. "There is hardly an extra piaster among us."

"We mint piasters from our finger-nails when Murad Pasha speaks," the old man answered. "Come, let's hear what Stoyan the chandler thinks. He is always a man of ideas."

Mirko twisted his bare toes into the cracks of the cobblestones. Stoyan the chandler had been at the studio that night. A panicky idea struck him. What if some one wanted to talk to Dobry and found him asleep? It seemed to the boy that would be proof positive of his brother's guilt. Dobry must be awakened at all costs. Mirko rushed back home, ran along the balcony and pounded lustily at the bedroom-door.

"Out with you, you crickety scamp," his brother roared at him. "I'll tan your hide till it looks like Turkish leather if you don't leave me alone."

But Mirko pounded on unheeding.

"Dobry, *Bati* [Brother], Dobry," he panted between knocks. "You must get up. The Turks have found out——" Then he realized he must not give himself away. "I mean, I heard—Murad Pasha's money—all the taxes—Turkish soldiers have stolen them. You mustn't let them find you here sleeping, brother."

Dobry was awake in earnest as he opened the door. He was but half undressed, and his face was streaked with markings of charcoal partially washed off. The room behind him was in utter disorder, and a peculiar odor of burned cloth pervaded it. On the hearth before the fire-place Mirko saw the half-burned tassel of a Turkish *fez*. He clasped Dobry's hand convulsively.

"Do hurry, Dobry. Can't you hurry?" he pleaded.

"Be quiet, you little chip of nonsense," his brother answered, though not as crossly as before. "What is the matter with you? Tell me, what's all this stuff you are prating?"

Dobry was speaking calmly, but Mirko could see how tense his muscles were.

"Why, they've stolen the Pasha's money, the taxes, you know. Some men waylaid the wagon at the Krividol Gulch and went off with the whole wagon-load. The Pasha thinks Turkish deserters did it, that's what they all say on the street, but Kolio, that little snubby-nose, you know, says he believes it was *haiducks*. Say, brother, was it *haiducks*?"

Dobry laughed, but somewhat uneasily.

"The little goblins of Allhallows take you, Mirko, how do I know? Go tell Aunt Zora I want a broiled ox for breakfast. And listen," he added as the lad started, "just hang about the court, won't you, and let me know a little ahead if any one calls around. I want to straighten this place up a bit."

Mirko patrolled the court and street-entrance like a sentinel. If Dobry only knew how much of the inside of the matter Mirko understood, wouldn't he pull his ears for him! Still, the little chap thought, nobody would ever get that secret out of him. He wondered how it had all been done. Had Dobry *really*——?

He wondered about it until his thirst for information sent him back to the studio. When he entered, the room was in order and Dobry stood before his easel slapping paint at an icon of Saint George killing a fiery red dragon, with the little princess fleeing away in the background. Mirko, stretched on the floor, began playing with

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the paint-tubes, and, unable to restrain himself longer, burst out,

"How do you suppose they did it, Dobry? Was it pitch-dark, and did you ride down the path and——"

His brother cut him short,

"The best thing you can learn, Mirko, is to keep your hands off those paints and your mouth padlocked. When a twelve-year-old like you——"

THE door shook with a heavy knock. Mirko leaped to his feet, and the hair of Dobry's princess got the stroke of red intended for the dragon's tongue.

"See who it is." Dobry was mixing yellow and green on his palette to get blue. Mirko opened the door and almost screamed in fright. A bulky *zaptieh* stepped past him into the studio.

"Murad Pasha wants you at the *konak* (palace) as fast as your feet can carry you."

Dobry looked keenly at the Turk, but saw no light of intelligence there one way or the other. He answered simply,

"Tell the Pasha I shall come at once. And clean your boots next time you go into a decent man's house."

The *zaptieh's* officiousness vanished. He hesitated a moment, then left the room and walked down to the courtyard. Dobry put on his hat and coat coolly, deliberately. At the door Mirko's tense little figure arrested him. He put his hand kindly on the boy's head.

"Don't worry, little messenger," he said. "Remember just this: keep your ears open and your mouth *shut.* And stay around where you can be found in a twinkling."

The boy nodded and followed his brother along the balcony, down to the street-door. He watched him stride down the street with a mingled feeling of wonder and anxious pride. The *zaptieh* had gone on a short distance ahead; Dobry ignored him utterly.

Anyway, Mirko thought, the Turk had not dared to boss his brother! He knew too that under his coat, carefully concealed in the folds of his shirt, Dobry carried a small, shining revolver. Gathering what comfort he could, the lad crept back into the court, picked out a sunny spot, and watched until sheer weariness sent him to sleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRIDE OF THE VARDAR

DOBRY VLADIMIROFF'S father had been the chief *chorbadji* (squire) of the town of Goreno, and had often taken his son with him when called in by the Pasha to be ordered about on local affairs. The lad had inherited and cultivated a coolness and poise that gave the young man much of his father's prestige when the old *chorbadji* died. Even the Turks treated the young icon-painter with a degree of respect rarely vouchsafed to one of the oppressed race.

He strode nonchalantly along the street, but the Turkish *zaptieh,* keeping half a dozen steps in front of him, had a trick of waiting suspiciously at every street-crossing, until Slavy the saddler, hobbling a few elbow-lengths behind with a patched donkey-harness slung across his shoulder, could restrain his curiosity no longer.

"Whither bound, Dobry?"

"To the palace," Dobry answered. "I'm afraid some one has been cooking the Pasha's porridge in a brass bowl and left nothing much but a bad taste for him."

"We'd better hope there will be any taste at all for us if the Pasha wants his bowl filled again," Slavy remarked.

Stoyan the chandler stood in his shop-door listening. As Dobry passed, he called to him softly,

"All well, Dobry?"

Dobry raised his eyes significantly.

"Only the Pasha knows," he murmured. "This Abdul," with a contemptuous nod toward the *zaptieh* ahead, "brought me a note to go to the palace immediately. It looks well since he didn't insist on my walking in front of him. Just keep yourself informed at first hand, Stoyan, and let the others know how the land lies. Are our men all about to-day?"

"Oh yes; all up and going about our business as usual. Of the wagon-guards only Mahmut seems to have escaped, and he is a fool. You ought to see Gani, though. You know how he played the loyal driver till the very end. Well, I caught sight of him when they marched him across to the palace. He has lumps on his head like ducks' eggs, and his nose is broken and big as two. To look at him, he's the most faithful servant old Murad ever had."

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"Yes, all accounted for but the most important one," Dobry said anxiously.

"True," the chandler sighed. "I heard his Holiness cry out when they shot him. He shouted something at Ivan and his men from across the mountain, the name of some place it was I think, and off he galloped. I do hope he escaped."

"And I *do* hope——" Dobry began, but the *zaptieh* turned inquisitively. The icon-painter finished in a whisper, "If his wound was light, all's well; Ivan's men have hidden the haul by now."

Dobry raised his voice for Abdul's benefit.

"We've used about all our candles and may need a little more light. Mirko may call on you this evening."

The pebble-paved courtyard before Murad Pasha's palace was filled with excited villagers and wolfish, sullen soldiers. It was market-day, and the rough sheepskins of the mountaineers and shepherds scratched the gaily dyed homespun of the townsmen.

Dobry squeezed and elbowed his way through the crowd. Here and there some one called to him; he waved his *kalpak* with easy grace and went up the steps of the palace. The Turkish guards moved aside for him and he passed down the long corridor to the audience-chamber. Abdul himself opened the door and announced his arrival.

The room was long and narrow. Broad, low, thick-cushioned divans skirted the walls, broken with heavily paneled, dingy windows very close to the ceiling. There were no tables in the room and no chairs, except for a three-legged stool. In the middle a large polished brazier glowed with red-hot coals, and several iron bars of ominous size were heating in it.

Half a dozen Turkish officers sprawled over the divans in attitudes of officious *ennui;* at the top of the room, Murad Pasha toasted his lordly shins before a smaller brazier, pulled importantly at his *nargileh* and grunted sulkily at some intangible fate that seemed to be disturbing his equanimity.

MURAD was fair example of a type of provincial Governor not uncommon in Macedonia. His rise from outlawry to official dignity had been rapid and characteristic. With a band of Albanian robbers he had been sacking the Shar villages periodically, paying a fraction of the booty by way of tribute to the governor of the Kossovo villayet. The Turks allowed him free range. Finally the peasants, exasperated, organized a posse of their own, and in a clash somewhere in the upper reaches of the Vardar River, Murad's band was pretty well annihilated, he himself managing to escape.

The Albanian robber then succeeded in being appointed the head of a body of Turkish irregulars. Representing the peasants' posse as an organized revolt against the Empire, Murad swept over the Shar regions and proceeded to quiet the land. He knew the tastes of Turkish irregulars; he knew what Bashi-Bazouks wanted and he knew how to gain their admiration. He had found his chance.

The village of Presta had been the center of the peasant revolt. All the able-bodied men were in the mountains.

Murad entered Presta at sundown. At sunup there was no Presta.

It was quick work. Each soldier picked his house. There were three hundred and fifty of them. The old men and children were killed on the spot; the women and girls bound with their girdles and braids of long hair. The houses were then systematically sacked and set afire. About midnight, outside the village, Murad's Bashi-Bazouks piled high their booty around a huge campfire. The wails of the captives mingled sickeningly with the ribald jests and blood-besotted riot of the Turkish *gendarmerie.*

The story of Presta reached Uskub; a garrulous tongue carried it to Stamboul. Obviously a strong man had appeared in the Shar region. The dispensers of honors in Turkdom smiled on the efficient pacifier of Christian villages. Murad grew ambitious. A similar exploit of his, with gruesome variations, stirred the Vardar Valley near Veles.

About this time Essad Pasha of Goreno was relieved of his office "for lack of resolution." Murad was obviously the sort of man needed, and the next Winter saw the Albanian robber established as Pasha in Goreno. The sack of Presta and the pacification of the Veles district had provided him with a fair start for his harem. Thereto he proceeded to add the best that Goreno had to offer. Murad the Pasha was as gluttonous as Murad the Robber had been greedy.

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But that was years before. Sixty-year-old Murad was an apple soft with decay, which preserved a thin surface of solidity only by the most elaborate pomp and lordly mannerisms. The ex-robber sought to convince himself of his undiminished power in Goreno by building new harems and planning new prisons, but his wits were getting short. A robber in his youth, a libertine in mid-life, Murad vainly tried to be a local divinity in his old age. He had used up all his capital.

AS DOBRY'S name was called, the Pasha cleared his throat and drew himself up with self-importance. "Bring him in," he called.

For a moment the Bulgarian hesitated. He looked keenly at the officers present, as he always did when entering this room. In spite of the very apparent friendliness of Murad Pasha, Dobry could never forget the stories his grandfather had told him of men who had entered that room and whom no one had seen come out.

His quick glance reassured him, however, and his uneasiness vanished. He bowed low to the Pasha.

"Allah keep your liver sweet this morning, Pride of the Vardar," he recited.

Murad rubbed his tawny hands and nodded in acknowledgment of his favorite compliment.

"It is well you have come at once, Dobry. You suspect why you have been called. You have heard the news?"

"I suspect nothing," Dobry answered, choosing his words. "I get my knowledge from good sources. I await all news from yourself."

"You are your father's son," Murad commented, and nodded to the *zaptieh* at an inner door. It opened, and two guards escorted a much-bedraggled and shivering Mahmut, and a Gani with two eyes bulging from between the towels that wrapped his head like an Anatolian turban. Dobry could scarcely suppress a smile at the manifest thoroughness of the wagon-driver's make-up.

"Now, Mahmut, out with it. Tell me exactly what happened."

Mahmut shifted his gaze uneasily from one to another of the Turks sprawling over the divans. That he was ashamed of something was doubly apparent when he met Gani's contemptuous stare.

"IT WAS a black night, Beloved of Allah," he began, "and the Krividol Gulch was darker than a dungeon after sunset. The road is wide enough at first, but gets narrower and narrower as it winds up the mountain, until there is just room for a wagon and team. We *zaptiehs* had to divide; six of us went in front and six wound up the rear. When you reach the pass itself, the cliff shoots up one side and a sheer precipice shoots down the other."

"It is not quite that way, Pride of the Vardar," Gani interrupted. "I know that country like the inside of my sandal. There is a ditch between the road and the cliff. I know, because——"

"Hold your tongue until you are asked, you croaking bullfrog," Murad yarred at him. "Do you presume to teach Murad Pasha the lay of his own land? Go on, Mahmut."

A timely kick, administered by one of the guards, assisted Gani to subside.

"If there is a ditch," Mahmut continued, "I didn't see it, but I was one of the last in line and on the side next the Gulch itself. We were hoping the place was almost past. I heard Osman Effendi ask Gani how much farther it was. Gani—this dog here, Beloved of Allah—answered, 'Just around the bend and over the crest.'

"We were between two bends on a sort of shelf, and I don't remember just how it happened, but all of a sudden I thought the whole side of the cliff was falling over our heads. At the same time a dozen rifles cracked out in front of us and another dozen behind.

"We were caught. It was as clear a trap as you could imagine. We had our rifles ready, of course, just as orders had been, but it's hard to take aim in the dark behind you when you can't turn your horse's head. Osman, who was just in front of me, turned too quickly and I saw him and his horse go over the gorge together.

"It gave me an idea, and I slid off and let my mare take care of herself. She was one of the first to get shot, and almost crushed me when she fell. Meanwhile the firing kept up in front and some dozen or two men rushed up behind. It was no use. We yelled and cursed and fought like the Prophet's own soldiery, but they shot the horses from under us.

"How I escaped, Pasha, only Allah can tell. The wagon began to back on us. I

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saw it coming. The lanterns were dancing up and down. I waited until I saw two of the robbers jump to the seat. Beloved of Allah, they had fezes on, and the rag-and-bag of Ottoman deserters! It was plainly a band from the Uskub troops. Akiff Pasha does not pay his men regularly as you do, and they must have been hungry for plunder.

"I can fight any pack of Christian dogs, Pasha. I can, but what could one man do against Osmanli soldiery? I lay where I was, pretending I was dead, slipped away as soon as I could and ran here at top speed."

"How did it happen, when you were to start early in the morning, that you did not reach the pass until night?"

It was Dobry who asked the question. The Pasha looked at Gani.

"Answer that, you lazy-horned spawn of a snail," he cursed him. "Weren't my orders to leave here an hour after daybreak?"

"THEY were, Pride of the Vardar," Gani wailed, "and my old woman waked me up long before it was light, but when Osman Effendi led the horses to be harnessed, he lost his temper and lamed the white one with blows. We had to find another that would pull with the black horse, and the only one we could get was balky. He broke the wagon an hour out of here, and the sun was shining on the west wheels before we started on."

Murad Pasha swore in guttural Albanian.

"And you, you spoiled egg of a scarecrow," he turned once more to Gani, "why didn't you follow your balky horses? How did you drag your carcass here?"

Gani was almost sobbing.

"When I yelled and cursed for help, one of the ruffians gave me this."

He touched his nose with a grimace and swung around the room, so that all the Turks could observe for their own benefit. The ruse was successful. It broke the serious tenseness of the situation, and the Ottomans roared at the sorry plight of the wagon-driver.

"I found myself in the ditch," Gani continued, "and stayed there until they were all gone. What can one man do against Osmanli soldiers, when he has a broken nose at that, Pride of the Vardar?"

"Where did the robbers go?" one of the Turks asked.

"The soldiers, you mean?" Gani inquired. "I don't know, Effendi; it was so dark. Somewhere up the mountain, I suppose, or else down the pass and out into the valley, or else perhaps on the road to Uskub, or perchance——"

Murad Pasha waved an impatient hand. "Take this chunk of meat out of here," he beckoned to the guards.

"Now, Dobry *Chorbadji*," the Pasha began, "you see how it was. What is to be done?"

"I should say," Dobry answered slowly, "find the thieves."

"Of course, but how?"

"They are Turkish soldiers, Mahmut says."

"They spoke Turkish and looked like soldiers," the *zaptieh* put in.

"Oh, deserters, I suppose," the Pasha muttered, "who want to fill their bean-made stomachs with roast goose."

Dobry thought intently for a moment.

"Murad Pasha," he said at length, "this loss is not yours only, it is ours as well. The year has been dry, there is not a piaster to spare in the whole country around. Yet the Pasha must have money."

Murad nodded ready assent.

"The peasants will fear other taxes." The Pasha grunted scornfully. "They will move heaven and earth to get the robbers," Dobry concluded.

Murad leaned forward. It was a new idea—that of coöperation with the Bulgars.

"What do you mean?" he asked eagerly.

"LET us form a posse among ourselves and scour the country. I can get men who know every inch of the mountain-land. The peasants hold Priest Azarias as an uncle. We can have him swear in every man of them and find out exactly what he knows."

"But would they?"

"Would they have meat to eat when the cold freezes their blood? They will never rest until the money is safe in Uskub."

"And who will do this?"

"Well," Dobry considered carefully, "there is Stoyan the chandler, and Croom Dobreff and his brother——"

Enough!" cried the Pasha interrupted, "lead these out, and I'll have Torgut Effendi and Midhat Effendi and—and Jemil Effendi."

Dobry rose to go.

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"Oh," Murad stopped him, "you did not mention one fellow, and he is the craftiest of your whole Christian lot: Stavry the money-changer. He can smell gold as far as Aleppo."

Dobry was taken aback. So far the plan had worked splendidly. The Turks selected were like unto Murad Pasha, mushroom-headed libertines. But hawk-eyed Stavry the money-lender was a different proposition. His crafty treachery had been a constant source of anxiety to the group which met at Dobry's studio.

"Ye-es," he admitted, "but Stavry is a busy man. Perhaps he wouldn't go—wouldn't want to, I mean——"

He had touched a wrong chord.

"Who tells Murad Pasha 'I will' or 'I will not'?" the Albanian interrupted haughtily. "The old money-changer goes with the posse!"

Dobry bowed himself out.

CHAPTER VII

MANIO DREAMS OF OPULENCE

TO ACCOMPANY Dobry's posse, Murad Pasha had chosen three Turks as short-witted as himself, and an idiotic fortnight followed. Dobry was thorough in examining every deaf and dumb cripple in the mountain-land, and Priest Azarias performed elaborate ceremonies of "swearing in" the peasantry at every cross-road. Day by day they looked for traces of the Turkish soldiers who had robbed the tax-wagon. Barring Stavry, the Goreno men were tireless in the zeal, but the patience of the Turks was well-nigh exhausted.

They had clambered down the steep goat-path along the Pirin slopes, and their horses were waiting for them down the valley, some three hours distant by weary foot. But Dobry insisted on improving the remainder of the day by walking over to the Seven Well-springs sheep-sheds. He was sure Uncle Tosho might be able to give information about the thieving soldiery.

"Are you going to drag us to another muddle-head?" Torgut Effendi growled. "These stupids know nothing, and I am tired of their drivel."

"It is as the Pasha commands," Dobry pled. "We have not missed a single wood-shed. We must continue to proceed in our advance," and the Goreno men wisely agreed.

"But how much longer?" Stavry put in. "I've left my business a-chasing me over these hillsides. To look at you, Dobry, one would think you had organized a walking-club!"

"It isn't so bad though, is it now?" Midhat Effendi simpered, humming a gay, little air. "I didn't know what called the soldiers up to these villages so often. There are more plump quail around here than I have seen in a whole year in town. The town-game either keep too much under cover or aren't worth the bother. He started humming:

"O Aisha, Aisha, blooming blossom!"

Dobry cut him short.

"That roof a little below us is old Tosho's hut. We will stop there and at the little village beyond, then go a-horse into town. That covers our route; we'll have to think up some other way for next week."

"You can think me out," Torgut Effendi put in. "Murad Pasha has harems enough for all of me. I'm busy with my own."

They passed out of the pine-grove that hid Tosho's hut and sheep-sheds, and into the clearing above. As they did so, two men in peasant-garb went through the back gate and took the upland trail. Stoyan the chandler looked studiously off toward the valley. Dobry engaged the Turks in lively discussion. Only Stavry seemed to notice.

"There go two fellows up the mountain. I wonder if we shall have to chase them down before we leave."

Croom Dobreff looked at them casually.

"Two shepherds of Tosho's, I suppose," he said. "But say, Stavry, did you know that young Selim Bey is looking for a loan and offering seventeen per cent. to the right person?"

Stavry crossed himself quickly.

"May holy Saint Panteleimon preserve me from generous borrowers!" he exclaimed. "Selim Bey would make me wealthy too soon!"

The two men going up the mountain had disappeared in the thick undergrowth. Croom saw them give quick glances downward and take a twisting, half-obscured side path.

Uncle Tosho sat on a bench in the sunny courtyard, smoking his pipe and directing Manio the watchman in his clumsy attempts at mending a cart-wheel. Yana knitted in the doorway, and through the

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open window came the buzz of a spinning-wheel and a girl's clear voice keeping time. As the Turks entered the gateway, Yana spoke in a sharp undertone. Irina's head appeared an instant at the casement, then vanished and the wheel was still. Tosho rose and Manio dropped his work to listen.

"You are a long way from town, friends," he said, "and look tired. Yana, bring out some fresh buttermilk."

"You might add some bread and cheese, and maybe some little cold slices, with a pretty one to serve them, if you have them handy," Midhat drawled.

Tosho glanced at him in alarm, then questioningly at his fellow countrymen. Dobry did the explaining:

"IT is about the tax-money, Uncle Tosho. We are the investigating committee and have stopped here to learn if you or any of the shepherds heard or saw any signs of the Turkish soldiers that did the stealing?"

"Not the ghost of a sign," Uncle Tosho replied eagerly. "It has been just as quiet as——"

"Has it though!" Manio had been edging his way nearer the center. "Hasn't there been the ghost of a sign! I tell you, men, this place has fairly swarmed with ghosts since Allhallowmas."

The Turks pricked up their ears.

"What kind of ghosts?" Jemil Effendi asked sharply.

"Why, there was the two-headed horse I saw down by the gate, and, saving your honor, I hope it wasn't a Turk, and the monk-maiden by the Sweetheart's Well-spring, and the treasure——"

"Ho, but you saw all those spooks the night of Allhallowmas, Manio," Tosho laughed. "Besides, two-headed horses and dead girls don't carry off tax-money."

"But there are the treasure-hunters," Manio insisted. "They carry off more bread and cheese than any two human stomachs could hold in a fortnight."

"Manio is the most superstitious old codger in the whole district," Dobry explained, as Yana came out bringing a pitcher of cold buttermilk, some bread, and slices of roast lamb. "Father Azarias, swear Uncle Tosho in."

"My son Tosho," the priest began pompously, "by the long-suffering Saint Stephen and by the benignant Saint Mitrophan——"

"Aw, shut up," Torgut swore at him. "That clap-trap is about worn out. Here, Yana, or whatever they call you, bring on that litter. I'm hungry as a wolf."

Manio slunk toward the edge of the group, muttering his opinions to himself.

"Young upstarts can put it over gray-beards if they want, but I know what I saw. And I know the ghost of old Petko over the ridge did steal away a money-bag from his boy and nobody ever found it. I think that is what these treasure-hunters are looking for. It's their digging makes them so hungry. And they're finding *something*, else where do they get the piasters to pay Uncle Tosho for their bread and cheese?"

The words "piasters to pay Uncle Tosho" caught Stavry's greedy ears. He had been considering the general air of Tosho's establishment in surprise and speculation. Perhaps it would be well to have a little conversation with Manio. He followed the night-watchman away from the rest.

"What was that you said about treasure-hunters?" he asked insinuatingly. Manio brightened and drew himself up with an important air at being consulted by such a person as Stavry.

"THEY are up in the mountains somewhere," he explained. "They have been down twice now; I listened while they talked to Uncle Tosho, I heard enough. They've located a big find somewhere: diamonds as big as duck-eggs, I imagine, and all the gold and silver coins of the Archbishop with the Flying Sandals. They want to keep the haul all to themselves, the greedy hogs, and won't let any one else go in with them, but they pay Uncle Tosho whatever he asks when it comes to supplies. Why, just before you people came, they handed him a whole handful of piasters. They must be shoveling them in, up there in the mountains!"

"How many times have they been here, did you say?"

Manio's strange tale wakened Stavry's curiosity. Evidently this was no goblin yarn.

"When did they come first?"

"Come to think of it, that was on Allhallowmas too." Manio came closer. "That night two Turkish soldiers knocked. I saw the uniform and hid behind Yana's butter-tub, for I don't monkey around Turks. When we shepherds see those

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clothes, we don't feel any curiosity about what is inside. We've seen too much of their kind. I could see all that went on, though. When the soldiers asked for something to eat, Tosho gave them anything they wanted. They were so decent about it I suspected something, so peeped out and saw the face of one of the fellows in a good light. He had his head turned away from the rest.

"Well, *Chorbadji*, when I saw one of those treasure-hunters this afternoon I knew him in a minute. He was that very same Turkish soldier!"

Stavry gripped Manio's arm.

"Do you mean," he hissed, "that those treasure-hunters were in Turkish uniform, and it was on Allhallowmas?"

"Why sure!" Manio wriggled away, rubbing his arm. "I think that was the night they located the treasure. All kinds of goblins were out and old Petko's ghost——"

"Manio," Stavry interrupted, "how would you like to get a little of that treasure yourself?"

"That is my idea." The old man's face flamed with eagerness. "That is exactly my idea, *Chorbadji*. But I can't do much alone. I know the country, but those fellows will be too much for an old man like me."

"Listen," Stavry commanded. "Forget you have a tongue and go on about your business as usual. I'm rather interested in this treasure myself. What do you say to our going after it together?"

"You and me? I'll do it, *Chorbadji*." The watchman quivered with nervous excitement. "When shall we begin?"

"I'll let you know. In the meantime, keep absolutely mum. Not a word till I tell you, or you don't get a piaster's worth."

"Yes, yes, not a word, *Chorbadji*."

"Just one thing more. Manio, how far is it over to Krividol Gulch?"

"It's a good five hours by the road," the shepherd calculated, "but only about three if you know the path over the mountains. Why?"

"No reason," and Stavry moved nonchalantly toward the others.

"Been hearing more ghost-yarns?" Dobry asked, handing him a glass of milk.

"Oh yes," Stavry answered. "The old fellow is as chuck-full of them as Granny Marya herself. Are we about ready to start?"

Dobry's distrust was quieted. "Going in a few minutes," he said.

Manio went to the barn with his head in a whirl. At last he was to be his own master. He gave the half-mended cart-wheel a contemptuous kick as he passed, filled his pipe, and, stretching himself on a pile of straw in a sunny spot where he was pretty sure Uncle Tosho wouldn't notice him, fell to dreaming of coming days of opulence.

The posse, satisfied as to their stomachs, gathered up their coats and made ready to go down the trail toward town. They were weary of their fruitless search and anxious to be back. The three Turks looked on Dobry and his entire scheme with supreme contempt.

Out of sight of the yard, Stavry stopped with an exclamation.

"What is it?" Croom asked.

"Forgotten my long coat," he answered. "I'll have to go back. You go on; I'll catch up."

"I'll go back with you," Croom volunteered.

"There is no need of that," Stavry assured him. "I know the way."

Since he could not insist on the basis of intimacy, Croom was forced to proceed. Stavry climbed rapidly until the others had passed around the bend, then walked slowly on, lost in thought.

CHAPTER VIII

STAVRY'S COAT

"WE'LL have to send Manio back where he came from," old Tosho was saying to Yana. "The greedy old sinner has had his money-ears opened by those two boys who come here. He saw them pay me for the bread and cheese this morning."

"I wish we knew a little more about them," Yana worried, the wrinkles in her face deepening in her anxiety. "I wish Ivan were back here."

"Ivan ought to come home and get him a wife," Tosho said. "I'm getting too old to last much longer."

"Oh, you're good for many a year yet, Uncle Tosho."

The old couple started in alarm at the unexpectedness of the remark. Stavry had come up so quietly that neither had noticed his approach.

"What is wrong?" the shepherd queried.

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"I left my coat here," Stavry answered. "The others think I forgot it. There is a little matter of business I should like to talk over privately with you, Uncle Tosho. Is there some place——"

"Of course," but Tosho lacked enthusiasm. "Go in the house, Yana."

The old woman gathered up her knitting and went inside. She shut the door, but the window remained only half closed. Yana trusted Stavry somewhat less than did Tosho.

"Before we begin in earnest, I'd like to mention just a few facts, Uncle Tosho," Stavry commenced with a friendly smile. "Wasn't it just before Allhallowmas your Ivan went to Goreno and hasn't come back since then?"

"Ye-es," Tosho answered wonderingly.

"And wasn't it that same night that two Turkish soldiers stopped here for food; and aren't Turkish soldiers supposed to have robbed the Pasha's taxes that night; and haven't some treasure-seekers been coming here for food the last week or so and doesn't your Ivan know something about these treasure-seekers?

"I say, Tosho," Stavry leaned very close and watched the old man keenly, "has it ever occurred to you that those Turkish soldiers look exactly like the treasure-seekers who have been coming here?"

Uncle Tosho leaped to his feet and shook Stavry's hand almost off his arm. Old Yana's face appeared at the window for a fleeting instant. It was almost wild in its anxiety.

"And if all that is true," the old man stuttered, "what then, Stavry? I—I don't say it is—I never thought of it so—but what then?"

"Don't get excited, Tosho," Stavry said quietly. "We've lived through a great many things together, you and I. We're both Bulgars, and it's nothing to me more than it is to you whether Murad Pasha has one harem more or less. I learned some things this morning that made some other things a good deal clearer. I know all about the meetings of Dobry and Ivan and Croom and the rest, though I haven't been invited for a long time. And I know too that when your Ivan goes to the city he doesn't always get there, and when he does he isn't haunting the market-place. Maybe you haven't been in that two-legged house of Dobry's, but I have, and your Ivan could tell you a good bit about the arrangements of it too. Dobry hoodwinks Murad Pasha, but I know the tricks of him and his breed."

Tosho listened in silence. Confused notions over which he had pondered, remarks he had heard from Ivan, began to take on clear form. His heart beat rapidly and life-dreams of his father and father's father thrilled him anew.

"GANI was the driver of that wagon," Stavry kept on, "and Gani never fails to be present at Dobry's meetings. There is a deal of talk, but you and I will come right down to facts, Tosho. We may be in sympathy with revolution, we may know it needs money, but we have to live. And two hundred thousand piasters don't come into our reach every day; hey?"

But Stavry's half-hints were still unintelligible to Tosho's simple way of thinking. The old shepherd was obviously puzzled.

"I don't just get what you are driving at, Stavry," he said, taking off his sheepskin-cap and scratching his gray, stubby hair. "Tell me plainly what you mean and what you want."

Stavry studied the stones on the court-pavement for a moment, then rested his right elbow on the top of his cane and kept time to his slow words with an emphatic forefinger.

"On Allhallowmas night Dobry the icon-painter, Stoyan the chandler, Croom Dobreff, and some dozen others, perhaps with your Ivan among them, disguised as Turkish soldiers, stopped and robbed Murad Pasha's tax-wagon and killed all the guards but one Mahmut. Some of them are hiding with the treasure in the mountains and waiting for the storm to blow over."

Tosho staggered back.

"My son Ivan—all that money! Holy Saint Petka and Saint Nedelia! Stavry, do you know what you are saying?"

Yana had forgotten her caution, and was leaning over the window-sill, crossing herself and mumbling her prayers. Her teeth chattered, her lips were bloodless and trembling.

"Don't play the innocent with me now, Tosho," Stavry spoke sternly. "I know you are in with this crowd, else why should these treasure-hunters be coming here? Now since I have found you out and could lose the whole business for you, suppose you

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just let me in on it. One more to divide with won't make such a lot of difference."

The red spots on the old man's face grew purple. At last he understood his man. His eyes blazed.

"So that is your patriotism, is it?" he said in a low, tense voice. "And you call yourself a Bulgarian! Let me tell you this: I don't know one thing of which you speak. I give those treasure-hunters food because they pay for it. Further than that I do not know."

"Come, come, Tosho, can't you really see? Either you give me my share of the money or I tell the whole affair to Murad Pasha."

The old man's body quivered with uncontrollable rage. He shook his fist in the townsman's face.

"You —— greedy hound!" he hissed. "You would betray your own flesh and blood to satisfy your gluttony. But you'll pay for it! You'll pay for it!"

He advanced nearer and nearer Stavry. The other backed away from the threatening fist, slipping, sliding over the courtyard stones. Still old Tosho advanced, lavishing all his pent-up vocabulary on his departing guest:

"You whelp of a wild hog, you jaw of an ass and viper's tongue, you seventeen kinds of a sneaky lizard crawling over a village dung-heap, you cockroach of a money-lender, you Turkish boot-licking hypocrite, you smiling swill-bucket of rottenness, you——"

Stavry had reached the gate and backed himself out. There for the first time he turned from the irate old shepherd and hurried down the road. At a safe distance he turned once more and called back,

"You can shake your fist now, Tosho. Mine is of a different brand. It may lead, not drive you out the gate."

He waved his cane vindictively and limped down the road. Yana ran out and clasped Tosho's arm in silent despair.

"It's all right, old woman, it's all right," he reassured her, but his voice shook uncertainly.

The posse had reached the village long before Stavry entered. Dobry was just finishing a late supper when the money-lender's cane knocked at the heavy gate.

"I'd like to talk to you for a minute in the studio, Dobry," he said.

TO BE CONTINUED

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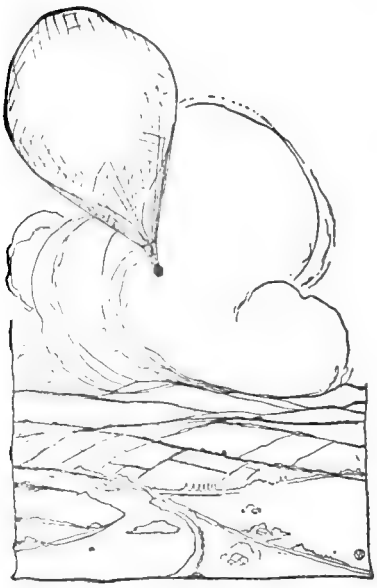
FALLING 3000 FEET IN A BALLOON

By Augustus Post



WHEN Mr. Holland Forbes telegraphed me in Washington to reply at once whether I would act as his aide in his balloon *Conqueror* to fly in the Berlin Gordon Bennett Cup-Race, I took very little time to make up my mind. An international balloon-race is always good for at least one tremendous thrill, however tamely it may start, and no one knows beforehand to whom the thrill is coming. And besides this general guarantee, the prospects for excitement in Berlin looked big from the start.

There would be, to begin with, the vast crowd—half a million within the enclosure and as many more watching from the streets, and watching with the interest of a warlike nation in the coming battle-ground, the sky. For even in this year of 1908 Germany was taking a long look ahead, which in war-matters means a look into the air, for in the air the battles of the future are surely going to be decided, wherever they are actually fought. Aircraft in Europe is taken so seriously because it is warcraft pure and simple, and even then the Germans realized that Victory has wings, and the nation with the best wings would have the most victories.

So an air-meet was sure to be an affair of national importance as well as international rivalry. I telegraphed "*Yes*" at once, said good-by to Mr. Orville Wright, whose flights at Fort Myer I had been watching for the Aero Club of America, and in less than no time we were on the ocean headed for Berlin and, though we did not know it, for the champion thrill of our lives.

Very few men in America own racing-balloons; comparatively few in proportion to the population have seen them in process of inflation or near enough to compare them in size with objects on the earth, so that I had perhaps better begin by explaining that the *Conqueror* was as large as a six-story house, which is perhaps less accurate than saying its capacity was 80,000 cubic feet, but more descriptive. The vast bubble—not so delicate either as that word implies, for it was made of very tough varnished cloth—was held within a network of ropes coming down to a concentrating ring, to which the basket was attached.

The gas-bag of a balloon ends in a neck or appendix, through which the gas is pumped into the balloon, and from which it may escape, usually very gradually, but in case of a sudden rise as rapidly as needed. The control of the appendix means in a measure the control of the escape of gas. In the *Conqueror* the appendix was purposely much longer than usual, hanging into the basket, and the German mechanicians who prepared the balloon for its ascent had securely tied the appendix-rope to the ring. The appendix-rope is a stout cord which holds

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the bottom of the balloon down and prevents the balloon parachuting. I speak of this cord because, as will be seen later, it was one of those little things that could take on a life- or death-value.

The day proved perfect October weather, and the arrangements had been made with the inspired accuracy of the German army. Eighty large balloons were to be sent off, so many that it took three days to get them into the air. Our race, being the *clou* of the meet, was kept until the last; twenty-three balloons rising, of which the *Conqueror* was the ninth. The great ball, moving within its confining mesh like something alive and breathing, owed its lifting-power of course to the fact that the enclosed gas tended to rise to a point where the air was as light as the balloon.

This it would have done at once, of course, had it not been weighted with sand-ballast, put on and taken off with the greatest care until the weight of the balloon was exactly that of the air about it. Delicately poised, it rested in equilibrium, neither rising nor falling. Then riding lightly on the shoulders of a detail of soldiers, we were taken to the starting-point to await the signal—for we of course had been weighed in and balanced with the balloon. As it lifted thirty-two hundred pounds, and as our weight and that of implements, cordage and baggage was twelve hundred pounds, we carried an equipment of a ton of sand-ballast.

SMASHING INTO THE GRAND STAND

UPON the instant of 3:40, the time scheduled far in advance, the balloon obeyed the command "Let go!" The least scatter of sand sets a balloon rising, and the *Conqueror* had gone but a few feet when a sudden sharp gust of wind drove her to one side into one of the crowded tribunes, or grand stands, about the starting-place.

The people fled. No one was injured, but as the basket smashed into the structure the force of the blow tore away several bags of ballast that were clustered around the outside of the car, and broke open several others, filling the air with a cloud of sand. As a result the balloon, relieved of so much weight at once, its car swinging far out from side to side like a giant pendulum, shot up at lightning speed.

It went three thousand feet straight into the air before one could say "Jack Robinson." All at once Berlin lay beneath us like a map, a square mile black with people, with a brilliant bit of color made by the flags draping the Emperor's box in the tribune, countless banners fluttering from a sea of roofs, thin films of smoke marking the factories masked beneath them, and streets losing themselves in country roads beyond.

From where we hung the sky seemed full of balloons. Those that had just preceded us stretched out in a long line, marking the course of the fresh breeze. Already the first were far away. The gas in the *Conqueror* had expanded very rapidly, causing the appendix to become greatly distended, and gas began to pour out from its lower end with a throbbing, groaning sound and a very strong odor.

Our instruments showed that we were still rising rapidly. The escaping gas began to roar, and the appendix lashed about the car like a fire-hose when the full stream goes through. That of course was what it should do; it was adjusting itself to circumstances, and acting like a locomotive letting off steam—but when I heard it making almost as much noise as a locomotive and realized that the tremendous pressure put on an iron boiler on the solid earth was being exerted on a pocket-handkerchief three thousand feet in the air, it began to dawn upon me that this might not be an ordinary trip.

But the swaying had stopped. The balloon was riding smoothly, and we settled ourselves down, for we had every intention of making a long journey. It was intensely quiet. At the great height only a murmur came up from all the cheering, band-playing city.

We had food for two weeks—not that we had any idea of being in the air more than two days at the most, but the radius of our circle of possible flight would take us far into Russia on one side or deep into Africa on the other. The thoughtful care of the German authorities had given us phrase-books for more languages than I had ever known existed, with parallel columns of sentences, phonetically spelt, providing for every possible contingency and then some. Some one who had been there had evidently made out the sentences, for I remember one was "Don't all speak at once," and "Show us on your fingers." With one thing and another, although we had scaled down the equipment to the lowest possible point, the

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basket was so well filled that we certainly had not one inch of spare room. We started housekeeping by getting out the instruments, and Forbes got into soft slippers.

"How nicely it works!" said he, his eyes upon the appendix.

All at once I heard a ripping, tearing sound, not loud, but fatally distinct. I looked up, and saw daylight through the top of the balloon.

That is something the balloonist rarely sees. All about him may be blue sky or clouds, but above him always the yellow mass of the balloon steady as a roof: Now I saw blue sky through it.

"Forbes, she's gone," said I.

"——!" said he. "Get out the ballast."

A sound as of swishing silk told that the balloon fabric was straining through the enclosing mesh of ropes as the rapid fall drove it upward. The appendix-rope was still tied as the thoughtful Germans had left it. I untied it just in the nick of time as the slack of the rope shot through my hand—and the balloon, released, began to spread out within the meshes and form a sort of parachute. An instant more, and the knot would have been fast, and before we could even have slashed through the rope, the balloon, held tight in the middle to the car beneath, would have dashed to earth like a rag tied to a stone.

It is so nearly second nature to a balloonist never to drop a whole sand-bag that I was scattering their contents over the side when Forbes, drawing his big knife, began to cut them off from where they hung in bunches outside the balloon. "Everybody's looking at us," he said. "They can dodge. We've got to save ourselves."

He was right; everybody was looking. The sixty-pound bags, which, had they struck a man from that height would have made him like a potato struck with a masher, did no damage to any of the million watchers below.

I saw one hit a chimney and send the bricks flying like the spray of a fountain. One struck between a man and his wife who were walking in a quiet street at some distance. The lady fainted, and her husband sent to us next day for our photographs and autographs as a souvenir of the occasion. We read afterwards in the newspapers that one of the bags had gone through a baby-carriage, smashing it flat a few seconds after the nurse had snatched out the child. She did not ask us for a souvenir—she will no doubt remember that very distinctly without assistance.

THE CRASH

IN SPITE of throwing out everything that we could grasp, we were still descending with terrific rapidity. The air was full of sand from the emptied ballast-bags. It was like rushing in an automobile through a simoon, such as I remember beyond Tangiers. Now the ground began to jump up at us. It seemed a choice of deaths, whether we would be killed at once on the roofs or, striking safely, roll from one of these to the street below, for a sixty-foot drop without a parachute is as dangerous as three thousand feet with even an impromptu one.

Before we had time to think, we had struck one of the sloping roofs of Friedenau, a Berlin suburb. Just before the car crashed, we leaped into the air and, catching the concentrating ring above our heads, hung from it as from a trapeze, so that though the car crashed through the tiled roof and wedged itself halfway to the floor below, we sprang down as soon as she had landed, quite uninjured.

The balloon-cloth, limp and lifeless, hung in huge folds over the roof and draped halfway to the street below. We had come so rapidly as to have outstripped the racing crowds. Only a few watchers, hastily scrambling up to nearby roofs, were ready to shout greetings to us in the quiet suburb, nearly deserted for the great meeting at Berlin.

An instant's examination showed me that my camera was unhurt, and within five minutes from the time we struck I had taken several pictures which, in spite of the poor light of the afternoon, turned out clear enough to preserve for me an image of the strangest landing-place I have ever had.

We were indeed so busily engaged in making out the report, unpacking and attending to the regular details that go with the end of every balloon-trip, that we had not noticed the murmur about us that was growing gradually to a roar of voices. A group of white-faced men, breathless from running, stormed through the skylight and almost fell into our arms. It seemed but a moment then before the roof was jammed with people,

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congratulating, wondering, applauding. They seemed especially surprised that we were calmly attending to business. The fact that Forbes, entirely unruffled, was searching in the basket to find his shoes was put into the papers next day as an instance of the intrepidity of the American sportsman.

The noise from below grew even louder. Our reports were now ready, the witnesses had signed, our cablegrams had been entrusted to messengers announcing to those at home our safe arrival—and now we came down the stairs and under the escort of the fire department, for which some one had thoughtfully telephoned, came out upon the landing of the steps leading to the street. Now we knew why the sound had been so loud. Now it rose into a vast and mighty roar. A solid mass of mankind, packed from curb to curb and swarming thick over the house-steps and sidewalks as far as the eye could see, packed so that face was close to face, cheered madly in one great outburst of human joy that two human beings whom they had never before seen, whose very names were to them as yet unknown, two strangers from oversea, were alive and safe after deadly peril.

THE GETTING OF BOH NA-GHEE

By Gordon McCreagh

THE Commissioner of Tuktoo Division sat in his office frowning over a letter bearing the lion and unicorn crest in red relief. He read it over again. There was no doubt of it; censure was clearly implied in the ponderous verbiage of the Burma Government. It ran:

To the Commissioner,
Tuktoo Division.

Sir:—

I am desired to acknowledge the receipt of your report on the death of Mr. E. W. Baker, Superintendent of Police in your Division. His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor desires me to call your special attention to the fact that this constitutes the second European murder attributed to Boh Na-Ghee in your district during the short space of two months, and to say that he confidently looks to you to see that it shall be the last.

To this end Mr. T. O'Neil has been provisionally gazetted to the vacancy. This officer is rather young to hold such an appointment, but His Excellency has confidence in his ability; nevertheless he wishes you to understand that he is strictly on probation, and that his confirmation in the appointment will depend entirely on your report as to his fitness. Your most obedient servant,

E. Chalmers,
Secretary to H. E. the L.-G.

The Commissioner muttered an impatient exclamation.

"Hang it all, does he think that I can charm my people against rifle bullets?" he grumbled.

Then, feeling the need of sympathy, he went into the room where his assistant sat.

"Read that," he grunted, throwing the letter on the table.

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The assistant skimmed through it.

"Who is this O'Neil?" he asked. "What does he do?"

This was the first and invariable inquiry of a newcomer. To these men exiled in the outposts of civilization the vitally interesting point about a stranger was the extent to which he could contribute to the social life of the little community.

"Do!" returned the Commissioner. "He does nothing. He is the man who said that life in a district station consists of work and the three B's, and that the two can't go together."

"Sounds pretty epigrammatic," said the younger man. "What does he mean?"

"Bridge, Booze, and Billiards. But if he brings those ideas up here I shall have to report unfavorably; we can't afford to have a deadhead in a small station like this, even if he is a smart officer. Well, I hope he'll enjoy hunting the Boh."

The assistant smiled grimly.

"The Boh doesn't usually wait to be hunted—he hunts."

"Well, the L.-G. has confidence in his ability," quoted the Commissioner. "Hope he deserves it. By the way, you might file the letter personally, as it's confidential; though what use a confidential letter can be in an office full of native clerks is beyond me."

The Commissioner spoke from long experience. Though the letter arrived sealed and ostensibly unopened, he was quite sure that its contents were even then being whispered about his office.

By early sunrise Boh Na-Ghee was listening to a message to the effect that one O'Neil, who had had much experience in the Chindwin District with dacoits had been ordered to Tuktoo for the special purpose of running him down with his whole gang.

The Boh laughed uproariously and with genuine glee. Then, "Listen," said he. "Let it be reported to me without fail when this hunter of men arrives, and I will send him a messenger with a message of greeting."

THREE days later a card was brought in to the Commissioner—"T. O'Neil."

"The sahib waits without," said the orderly.

"Give him my salaam," ordered the Commissioner, and turned again to his occupation of hurriedly scribbling orders on the margins of a pile of correspondence before him. On finishing, he rang the bell on the table impatiently.

"Well, didn't you tell the sahib I was ready to see him?" he demanded without looking up.

"I'm sorry," said a deep voice behind him. "Perhaps I should have knocked."

The Commissioner wheeled in quick astonishment and beheld a broad-built, bronzed figure of medium height, with an expressionless face which looked as if it had been carved out of tough wood by some skilled craftsman.

"I beg your pardon," he apologized. "I don't know how you ever came in without my hearing you."

The ghost of a smile flickered behind the steely gray eyes for a moment and went out again without a muscle in the rest of the face moving.

"Take a seat," continued the Commissioner. "I hadn't expected you for two or three days yet. How on earth did you get here so soon? It's three days from Kindat down the river and another two by rail."

"Oh, I came in over the mountains with my orderly," explained O'Neil. "Of course, I sent my baggage by the ordinary way. You see," he continued, "I thought it would be a good opportunity to get acquainted with the country, especially as my duties will lie chiefly there."

"But, man alive," protested the Commissioner, "the mountains simply swarm with the Boh's friends. Nobody goes there without an escort."

"Yes, so I was told," said O'Neil simply. "But we weren't seen. My orderly's a Gurkha from Nepal, and a good woodsman."

The Commissioner just gazed at him in wonder. His heart had sunk at the grim appearance of his new Police Superintendent, but there was something about this keen-eyed young man that brought a feeling of deep comfort as he thought of the lieutenant-governor's letter, and recollected that the power behind the throne, on whom his own position depended, "confidently looked to him" to see that the Boh's latest depredation should be his last.

Then the sacred laws of hospitality, which are held in high reverence by white men who live in the far corners of the earth, claimed

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his attention; and, putting aside his personal feelings, he turned to the other with a smile of well-simulated cordiality.

"Well, look here," he invited. "If your baggage hasn't arrived, I'm sure my wife will be very pleased to put you up for a couple of days till you can settle down."

"You're really very kind," murmured O'Neil; "and I can only accept your offer with the deepest gratitude. It will save me a great deal of trouble."

"Don't mention it, my boy, don't mention it; I could do no less. And I'll have Travers over to dinner this evening—he's your assistant, you know. I'll have him come early, and we can tell you something about your duties. By the way, I suppose you've brought a dress suit?"

"Of course," replied O'Neil. He knew that according to the snobbish conventions of district official life a dress suit was far more important than a knowledge of one's duties.

DINNER was over. The Commissioner's wife had retired to the "drawing-room," leaving the three men to their whisky-pegs and cigars. This was the period for relaxation from the stiff formality of the meal. The men assumed comfortable attitudes, and the talk turned, of course, on shop.

There are only two subjects for conversation in the jungles; work, and the doings of one's neighbors. It was rather too early for scandal yet, so the Commissioner was describing his new district to O'Neil, while Travers interpolated useful scraps of information about the people and their peculiarities. O'Neil listened silently, turning his keen eyes from one to the other.

Of course, the Boh loomed large in the foreground.

"You'll find your work cut out for you, O'Neil," the Commissioner was saying. "This Na-Ghee isn't an ordinary market-cart robber; he's a daring leader with a considerable gang. And he has pulled off some very cunning *coups*. I suppose you heard how poor Baker went out?"

O'Neil shook his head.

"Well, Na-Ghee planned to rob a native jeweler in a little village about eight miles from here, and arranged that Baker should get the information a couple of hours in advance. Baker raced off with a few of his men, and ran slap into an ambush. He was dropped dead with four of his fellows, and, of course, the rest bolted; after which the Boh went calmly ahead and looted the jeweler as arranged.

"Travers went out and chased him all round the country, but what the devil could he do, with half the villagers in Na-Ghee's pay carrying him information? Tell him about it, Travers."

Travers had tilted his chair back and was blowing contemplative smoke-rings at the ceiling, nodding his head from time to time in confirmation of the Commissioner's words.

"Yes," he agreed. "That's the trouble with the Boh. Every move a fellow makes is report——"

A sharp crack from without the stockade, a thin tinkle of glass, and the front legs of Travers' chair came down with a bang, almost simultaneously.

The Commissioner and O'Neil hurled themselves away from the direct line in front of the window and stood looking at the jagged round hole in the glass with its long, radiating cracks. Only Travers sat where he was, his elbows resting on the arms of his chair, and his head bowed on his chest as if in deep thought, while his cigar burned a smoking hole in the tablecloth.

The Commissioner looked round and saw him.

"Jump, you fool!" he shouted. Then, "My God, he's hit!" he cried, as he saw a thin trickle of crimson steal down the white shirt-front. He rushed up to drag him out of the way; but Travers was a heavy man, and the Commissioner was short and fat.

"Give a hand, O'Neil," he panted, and swore aloud in his excitement as he received no response. O'Neil had dived out of the doorway.

The Commissioner cursed him for a white-livered craven and yelled for the servants. After a considerable delay a scared attendant helped him to remove Travers to the couch.

"Tell the memsahib to remain in the drawing-room," was the Commissioner's first order. The next was, "Run for the doctor sahib at once, *ekdum*."

The doctor's bungalow was some little distance off. The distracted Commissioner paced the floor for fifteen minutes before the doctor could arrive. A very brief examination was sufficient. The physician looked up and shook his head.

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"The ball penetrated below his chin, and the whole top of his head is loose," he said with a shudder. "Death must have been instantaneous."

"I thought so from the way he fell," said the deep voice of O'Neil behind them, causing both men, in the jangled state of their nerves, to turn with a start. He had come in silently as a cat, and stood holding a rifle with a silver-inlaid stock and a highly ornamented cartridge-belt in his hands.

"Got him about two hundred yards out," he announced briefly, as he jerked an empty shell from his revolver and squinted down the barrel. "If you give me a couple of men, I'll fetch the body in."

"Who is that extraordinary man?" asked the doctor when he had gone.

But the Commissioner did not seem to hear him. He was again agitatedly pacing the floor muttering, "My God, My God! the third in two months. What will they say at headquarters?"

This was Boh Na-Ghee's message to the new Superintendent of Police.

O'NEIL spent the next few weeks in a whirl of activity, getting acquainted with his district and his thirty-five mounted troopers. These men had lived a life of easy inefficiency under their late chief, and had waxed fat on a system of petty extortions such as the Indian Police invariably establish throughout the villages which come under their grasp. O'Neil soon found that this was the chief reason why the Boh had so many friends ready to inform him of every move of his enemies.

"If we must be robbed," said the Burmans, "we had far rather be robbed by a countryman than by foreigners out of India."

He immediately embarked on a campaign against this *zoolum* or graft, assisted only by his orderly. This man was a sturdy, clean-cut mountaineer from the free kingdom of Nepal, and these scourings of Lower Bengal were his natural and hereditary enemies. Though the two had to contend against a hundred cunning wiles, the crafty troopers soon found that their "just perquisites" were one by one slipping from their grasp and were correspondingly indignant.

Not only were their incomes considerably reduced under the new régime, but they had to work harder into the bargain. Though the Boh was the main problem, minor delinquencies were frequent, and O'Neil kept small squads of his men constantly in the saddle schooling his district, till the Burmans gave him the name of "*Min Ta-Laing*," which means "Man-who-never-sleeps."

This state of affairs produced many secret whisperings and murmurings of discontent among the thirty-five. At last they determined to send O'Neil a "death warning." One of their number was chosen to creep to his bungalow by night and there lay out on the veranda an intricate pattern of circles and triangles in colored rice. This is the Hindu version of a black-hand letter, and those skilled in its interpretation can read from the pattern exactly what the complaint is and what retribution is threatened.

But, stealthy as the designer was in his task, Man-who-never-sleeps in some way became aware of his presence. Leaping on him out of the darkness, O'Neil grabbed him by the neck in grim silence and forced him to eat every grain that he had laid down, to the irretrievable loss, not only of his honor among his fellows, but—what is infinitely worse to a Hindu — his caste. Then O'Neil kicked the malcontent down the veranda steps, still without saying a word or striking a light to see which of his men the offender was.

After that the troopers settled down with true Oriental fatalism to accept this curse that had been laid upon them.

All this while the Boh gave no sign; partly, as O'Neil rightly guessed, because he was taking stock of the new Superintendent, and partly because he was planning some peculiarly daring outrage.

Meanwhile O'Neil had his own troubles with his fellow officials. When he was asked to join the local club where they played bridge and billiards and drank large quantities of Scotch whisky, he politely refused, asserting as his reason that he could not afford to do so. His interlocutors went away fuming, with the firm conviction that he was stingy with his money. As a matter of fact, however, O'Neil had meant that he could not afford to let late hours and liquor interfere with his work.

His attitude was unprecedented. An official who refused to mix in with the effete social life of a district-station was not to be tolerated.

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But O'Neil did worse even than this. When asked how much he would bet on Pretty Polly, the pride of Tuktoo, who was to be raced against Shwémyo next month, carrying all the available money in Tuktoo on her back, he committed the heresy of saying he would not bet because he was of the opinion that the Shwémyo horse would win. He knew that Shwémyo's jockey was an athletic Scotsman of the Post Office Department, and common sense told him that the other horse would be better trained and better ridden.

However, patriotic Tuktoo cried out against him. In fact, the Commissioner took occasion to draw him aside one day and speak to him about his attitude in general.

"See here, O'Neil," he began. "You ought to know better than to go on like this. You've been in the country long enough to know that in a small station like this you're expected to join in with the other fellows in everything."

"I understand you, sir," O'Neil had replied; "and I wish I could do as you say, for I am not a hermit by nature; but I know, and you know, that I can't play bridge all night and be up chasing crooks at two in the morning. I'm here on probation, and my promotion depends on my ability to keep things quiet in this district. I need that promotion," he went on quietly, with the first trace of expression the Commissioner had ever seen in his face, "and I'll tell you why. There's a girl at home in Limerick who's waited five years for it to come—five years, Mr. Raynor! And—I'm going to—get—it."

The Commissioner looked at O'Neil, standing there, keen and determined. In contrast to O'Neil's hard, trained efficiency there rose before his eyes the picture of the flabby incompetence which had marked his own life and was so apparent in the lives of his fellow officials of the club. A deep hatred for this young man who showed them all up in such unfavorable contrast took possession of his soul.

O'Neil was quick to see that his chief was not pleased, but in his innocence he consoled himself with the reflection that as long as he did his duty satisfactorily no harm could come to him. He little knew how great a part the Commissioner's report would play in his subsequent promotion.

Things were in this state when the Boh played his next stroke, in which daring insult was mingled with injury.

It was six in the evening, and all the men had come in to the club from their various offices, when a stable-boy was assisted in. They all rose to their feet with a feeling of excitement; they knew that something must be very much amiss for a wounded native to be brought into the sacred precincts of the club-house.

The feeling was justified. The man's faltering story was short and incisive. He had taken Pretty Polly out for exercise an hour ago, and had ridden but half a mile, when suddenly five men had sprung out on him with swords and clubs. That was all he knew.

The news fell like a thunderbolt. The doctor instinctively took the patient off to his little hospital, while the rest of the men stood about in a daze. Their first thought had been the race. Most of them had laid heavy odds on Pretty Polly, and they had no other horse which could stand any chance against Shwémyo. They began to calculate helplessly their certain losses. Many of them with the nervous impulse of long habit ordered drinks.

Suddenly "Let's go to O'Neil," somebody shouted. "If he's such a deuce of a good policeman, there's just a chance that he might catch him."

They sprang to their feet and raced to O'Neil's bungalow in a body, bursting unceremoniously into the dining-room, where they found a meal laid out from which the dish-covers had not yet been removed.

"O'Neil," they yelled in chorus. "Hello there, O'Neil! Where are you?"

There was no reply. Their hearts sank. What if he were absent somewhere on his duties and could not be found?

An indignant servant arrived from the rear of the house to inquire into the cause of the uproar. "The sahib? Oh, the sahib had suddenly run off fifteen minutes ago to pursue a man who had stolen somebody's horse."

THE news had been brought to O'Neil by his orderly. The quick-witted little Gurkha had met the party bringing in the wounded rider on the road, and while they, slowly and with much noise, had been conveying the boy to the club-house, he had run straight to his master with blazing eyes and a fierce exultation

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at the prospect of approaching conflict. "Shall I send a messenger to recall the men who have gone to Kyaukse for the new remounts?" he asked as he concluded his tale.

"No time for that, Jung Bir," replied O'Neil, hurriedly strapping his leggings. "Besides there is no need; I gave orders that five men should stay in barracks."

The Gurkha grunted scornfully. "Sahib, with these low country swine it is one thing to give orders and another to see how they are carried out. Five men have indeed stayed behind, but, of the five, four are sick and one is old Sher Ali, the barrack-master, who is too fat to take saddle for an expedition such as this."

O'Neil sat down thoughtfully and swore softly to himself, while his mind rapidly reviewed the situation. What confounded ill luck! Here was a chance indeed—the Boh, with only four men! When would he ever get such an opportunity again? The man's capture meant a big reward, and then—promotion.

His mind was made up. He would stake everything on the venture. He laughed aloud and buckled on his revolver-belt with a snap.

"It matters not," he said. "I go alone—unless of thy own free will thou wilt accompany me, Jung Bir; for in this matter of two against five I can not order thee."

The little hillman grinned cheerfully.

"Nay, sahib, how could I let my father and my mother go alone? As for the odds, what matter? We twain have played together with death many times."

"Good man, Jung Bir!" was all O'Neil's comment. Ten minutes later he was trotting through the silent jungle followed by the Gurkha, who cheerfully whistled through his teeth queer little tunes in minor keys that ended nowhere.

As they rode, O'Neil was thinking hard, searching for a plan of campaign. And here the knowledge of the country which his unfailing activity of the last few weeks had given him stood him in good stead. Piece by piece he mapped out the ground, and bit by bit he perfected his plan. Finally he turned to the Gurkha:

"Jung Bir," he began, "the men have had an hour's start. Therefore it seems to me that it is hopeless to catch up with them."

"So much I know, sahib. I was but waiting to hear what the sahib's wisdom had shown him."

"H'm!" grunted O'Neil. "You seem to be darned satisfied about it."

"Why not, sahib? Do I not know that the sahib always has a plan?"

O'Neil's only comment was another grunt.

"Well," he went on, "it is in my mind that to return to his own place from here, the Boh will surely first travel to the Yedaw Ford, and thence by the Paukte Road to the mountains. If, therefore, we swim the Yedaw here, thou and I, leaving our horses on this side, we may lie in wait by the Paukte Road, and when he comes we may follow till he camps for the night. While they sleep, an opportunity will occur."

"Ow!" admired the Gurkha. "That is a cunning plan; moreover there will surely be fighting."

Forthwith the bloodthirsty little fellow took out a little stone and his great *kookerie* and began whetting its already razor-edge with cheerful relish. This *kookerie* was a sort of heavy knife which his people are never seen without. Of boomerang shape, with a broad blade and exquisite balance, in experienced hands it forms a terrible weapon for close quarters.

Suddenly he held up his head and listened.

"Sahib," he whispered, "there is one who trails us."

"I know it," answered O'Neil quietly. "The Boh is a clever man and he has always a tracker waiting to take up the trail as soon as I go out anywhere. I do but wait for a favorable place, and then I will dismount and take him, for the Boh must have no knowledge of our plan."

"Nay, sahib," remonstrated the Gurkha. "This is no matter for a gun and noise; let me show how my people would do this thing."

Scarce waiting for O'Neil's approval, he slipped silently to the ground.

"Do thou lead my horse, Sahib," he whispered, "that he may suspect nothing. For the rest——"

He lovingly drew his *kookerie* again and melted into the jungle.

Ten minutes later he trotted up behind and climbed onto his horse with an expression of deep content.

"He had two rupees and some small change," he announced.

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Shortly afterward they came to the banks of the Yedaw, which was a broad and swift-flowing stream.

"Wow! It will be cold," shivered the Gurkha. "Can the sahib do it? As for me, I am accustomed to these mountain streams."

"There is no other way; I *must* do it," answered O'Neil. "As for the cold, warmth will follow on the way to the Paukte Road; the traveling will be bad and there will be need for much haste."

They tied their horses carefully and waded in. Soon, in spite of their exertions to stem the current, their teeth were chattering with the chill of the melted snow from the mountains. Once O'Neil felt a gripping sensation in his leg suggestive of cramp, and for a moment a wave of unreasoning terror swept over his soul, bringing an almost irresistible temptation to turn back while he yet knew that he could reach the bank. But he set his teeth and went doggedly forward; this was the only chance of coming up with the Boh. The feeling passed. A little later he scrambled ashore on the other side, where he found the Gurkha waiting for him.

Without exchanging a word they set off on a long jog-trot which was to bring them to the nearest point in the Paukte Road where they hoped to intercept the Boh and his party. As O'Neil had predicted, they were thoroughly dry and considerably warmer than was pleasant by the time they arrived.

THEY hid themselves and settled down to the weary task of waiting —waiting for the moon to rise and for the Boh to arrive. Noxious insects crawled over them and sickening doubts assailed them as to whether their quarry had not gone by already, for until the moon shed some light on the path they could see no telltale tracks.

The Gurkha was accustomed to the habitations of his own people, so ants and stinging things troubled him not. But O'Neil's less callous skin was tortured by all the varieties of malignant tropical vermin. Yet he lay still, without a turn or a twist to relieve himself, knowing that the least sound might betray them to a clever forerunner in case the Boh took the precaution to send one ahead.

At length the wait came to an end. A far-away hoof-beat rewarded their patience. The Gurkha listened with his ear to the ground.

"Sahib, there be two horses only," he breathed anxiously.

O'Neil shook his head.

"Not two. One. The other is a man running, with boots on, and I have heard that the Boh always wears English boots."

The Gurkha listened again, but it was not until the sound was much nearer that he could distinguish the difference. They stiffened themselves and lay like logs as the party came by; five men and Pretty Polly, all going at the same jog-trot, which the Burmans can keep up for hours.

The watchers stole silently out of their hiding-place and followed like shadows, bringing all their knowledge of woodcraft to play to avoid the least noise. But in spite of their care the Gurkha stepped on a dry branch lying in a dark shadow. In the night stillness the wood snapped like a pistol-shot.

Immediately the party ahead stopped suspiciously and the Boh sent a man back to investigate. O'Neil caught his orderly by the arm.

"Follow," he whispered. Uttering a series of grunts and squeaks in excellent imitation of a startled wild pig, he crashed off into the thicket.

The Burman laughed. "*Thamin shi de*," he called to the others, and hurried after them as they broke into their trot again; and the trailers stole out and followed like hunting wolves.

At length the chief held up his hand. They halted and struck off at right angles to the path, picking their way among the trees till the leader thought they were far enough from the road to light a fire without fear of detection by possible passers-by.

"*Kaung de*, it is well," he announced in a harsh voice. "Here do we camp. Do thou, Hla-Oo, hobble the horse and take the first watch in this open place while we retire under the trees over there to prepare food."

O'Neil and his orderly watched them busy themselves about the camp. It was then that they remembered that neither of them had eaten since the morning. The Gurkha edged closer. "When we have slain them, sahib," he chuckled, "we will eat their meal."

O'Neil frowned at him. "There is to be

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no unnecessary slaying here," he warned.

The Gurkha grinned back at him. "In the stress of battle who will say what is necessary and what is not? But behold, sahib, a plan comes to me. The others are afar off and the watcher sits in tall grass as high as his chin. It is in my mind that we may stalk him and fall upon him silently. Thus will there be only four left. And having taken him, I will bind his cloth about my head and sit in his place, and it shall happen that when his relief comes we may take him singly also, leaving only three to contend against."

"Good!" muttered O'Neil. "Good man!" The cunning little hillman was indeed an adept at jungle warfare and had been quick to see his advantage.

Together they began to creep forward, foot by foot, inch by inch, on their stomachs, feeling before them for dry twigs and leaves which might betray their approach. Closer they came and closer.

It seemed as if they would really accomplish their purpose without mishap, when some curious sixth sense apparently warned their victim. He rose to his feet with an uneasy shudder—a white man would have said that he felt like somebody walking over his grave. He looked around, and his eye immediately fell on the two dark indentations in the long grass within a few yards of him which he did not remember having noticed before. He stepped forward cautiously to investigate, wading waist-deep through the tall stems. There was evidently something in the shadow in front of him; he peered forward.

There was nothing for it; discovery was now certain. A crooked gleam shot over the grass tops and the man sunk down with a loud "A-ah!" clutching at his stomach with rigid fingers through which the bowels gushed.

THE group at the fire sprang to their feet, snatching for their weapons. An evil-visaged ruffian came running to his fallen companion and crashed over him all in a heap, hocked, with the tendons of both legs gashed through behind the knee. This was the cunning warfare of the Gurkhas.

The little man had tasted blood, and the lust came upon him. Giving the whistling warcry of his people he rushed to meet the others in a blind rage of Berserk fury.

O'Neil saw the Boh leap at him, swinging a great two-handed *dah*, with another man just behind him. He tore out his sword, but realized as it left the scabbard that that light weapon would be useless to parry the sweep of the heavy *dah*. With the speed of light he dropped it, ducked under the blow and butted his shoulder into the Boh's chest like a football-player, sending his antagonist staggering into his follower. The three went rolling over together.

O'Neil's one endeavor was to keep on top of both men, but the Boh managed to roll away and spring to his feet like a cat. He swung up the long sword for another blow just as O'Neil snatched at his ankle and brought him down again sprawling. O'Neil instantly grabbed at the long handle of the weapon and fought for its possession. He was a powerful man and ordinarily would have experienced no difficulty in getting it, but he was very much occupied in keeping the other man from reaching his own weapon, which had been knocked from his grasp as he fell. In addition the Boh had the upper grip on the *dah*-handle and it was all he could do to prevent him from bringing the blade down on his head.

There are two kinds of fighters; those who try to carry everything before them in a blind fury and are yet quick to take advantage of every little opportunity as it occurs, and those who go to it more quietly, acting on the defensive while they think out means to make their own opportunities, which are so much the more effective when they are brought into use. O'Neil was of the latter sort. While he defended himself from the Boh's sword he was thinking furiously how to rid himself of the other man.

It was then that he was thankful for the course of *jiu-jitsu* training which he had gone through in the police school, which had taught him the use of his legs in a fight. He allowed the surprised man to raise his body from the ground a little and then immediately caught his neck in the crook of his knee. Then he settled down to apply a process of strangulation, leaving both his arms free to attend to the Boh.

This small respite gave him an opportunity to look up and see Jung Bir in an evil case. Jung's opponent, a perfect giant, had in some way escaped the terrible *kookerie* and was now forcing his lighter antagonist back, waiting his opportunity to use

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a knife which he held between his teeth. O'Neil took in the situation in one hurried glance and instantly decided on a desperate move which depended on speed for its success.

He suddenly let go with his right hand and struck the Boh in the face with intent to daze him as much as possible. Then he snatched for his revolver. He got in one hurried shot at the giant and the next instant his fingers received a cruel gash as the weapon was knocked from his grasp.

For the next strenuous half-minute his attention was fully taken up with the Boh, and, hampered as he was in the use of his legs, he found himself weakening. It was with a feeling of heavenly relief that he finally heard his orderly's voice behind him saying: "Give him to me, sahib," and felt the other man dragged away from beneath him. It was now only a matter of seconds. Alone, the Boh was no match for him. Getting a good purchase with his knees, he slowly heaved the Boh over on to his face, when he secured him with an arm-and-leg hold.

"That was well done, sahib," said a cheerful voice, and he looked up to see Jung Bir, with his tunic half torn off his back, wiping his *kookerie* with a bunch of grass and smiling seraphically. "It was also a great shot of the sahib's, for which I will make offerings to the gods in his honor. Let me now assist in binding this dog. There! It now remains but to wash the sahib's wound and to eat the food of these robbers."

IT WAS daybreak when they arrived in Tuktoo with the prisoner and the recovered horse. O'Neil turned the former into the guard-room and quietly despatched the latter to the stable without waking any of the interested officials out of their downy beds. Then he called a bugler to him.

"Boot and saddle, for inspection of new remounts," he ordered.

Later in the day, when the station woke to the joyful news that Pretty Polly was even then getting a rubdown in the stable-yard, the whole community once again went to O'Neil's bungalow in a body, this time to make him an ovation. But a grave servant informed them that "the sahib had retired to his room, having previously expressed apprehension lest sundry other sahibs should come to see him with shoutings and outcry, and that his orders were in this event to say that he craved their indulgence and begged to be permitted to rest after his labors."

That evening a hot discussion, the subject of which was O'Neil, took place in the club. The majority argued that his recovery of Pretty Polly had raised him to the status of a public benefactor, and that the Commissioner could not now refuse to send in a glowing report. But a few of the older ones who knew the Commissioner better maintained that that official would not be carried away by temporary enthusiasm, and would come to the certain reflection that O'Neil, though perhaps the best policeman in Burma, was, and would ever remain, valueless to the social life of a district station, and that he would therefore inevitably condemn him. To this opinion the assistant agreed, adding, "It may be hard luck, and all that, but it's no use; the chief hates him on his own account."

On this discussion entered the Commissioner himself with a "service telegram" from the lieutenant-governor in reply to his earlier wire reporting the Boh's capture.

"I heard you were having an argument," he said condescendingly. "Well, this settles it."

The telegram read:

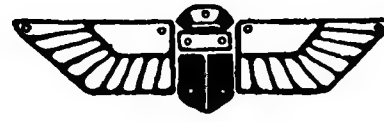
Your wire *re* Boh Na-Ghee. O'Neil transferred my personal staff. Inform him join duties at once.
L.-G.

At the same moment O'Neil was sending a cable to Limerick.

The cable read:

Come!

That was all.



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THAT YELLOW TRICK AT RESURRECTION BAY

By Carlyle Ellis

AS RELATED BY THE UNITED STATES SIGNAL-CORPS OPERATOR STATIONED AT SEWARD, IN AUGUST, 1914

THERE are a lot of people who know more about this thing than I. Why don't you see them? Oh, yes, I was in Seward when things broke loose, of course, and was about the first man the Japs captured. I had to be because of the open wire. They did sort of favor me, too, on account of that little Hurakaro and all the tricks he played on me with his funny English messages that looked so foolish and meant so much in their English-Japanese code that I heard about afterward.

Well, I had felt there was something in the wind for several days, but I was miles from guessing it would light in Seward. The Seattle office had seemed to us, up there at the finger-ends of the cable, unusually nervous and fussy. Not a word had come through that would give us an inkling of real trouble or war or anything of that sort, unless you count some War Department code messages that we had to relay through slap-bang at all hours. But something was in the air.

Anyway these messages meant a lot of sitting up nights (which never did agree with me), and that's how it happened that the Japs found me asleep at the switch.

It being in April there wasn't much real darkness, and it was about three o'clock one morning when I woke up suddenly with the feel of a hand on each shoulder. I thought it was my wife come to order me to bed, for I was sitting at the table in the office with my head on my arm and my hand on the key.

When I looked up, darned if there weren't three little Jap soldiers in slick khaki uniforms, one on each side of me and a third behind. I reached for my key from force of habit. The thing was beginning to dawn on me. But quick as a wink they had me handcuffed and pulled back from the table.

At that minute little Hurakaro showed himself in the doorway, grinning as usual, and blessed if he wasn't in uniform, too. He made the most gaudy apologies for my treatment, and remarked that it was "all unfortunate but necessary in war."

"War!" I said. "Where's the war?"

"It is here, Mistaire Logan," he answered, and he had the nerve to bow.

At that I jumped for the key again, but I didn't reach it. Those soldiers were quicker than cats.

Hurakaro never budged, but he called a quick order and two more soldiers came in with a sort of cage arrangement, which they proceeded to bolt over the instruments, but left the connections intact and protected them wherever there was a chance for breakage. I saw their game. They would receive whatever was sent over the wire, but would make sure that nothing went out.

About this time there was a yell from the town and then a gradually growing tumult. A shot or two was fired, but mostly the noise was made by screaming women. I looked out, and it seemed as if every house in town was surrounded by Japs in uniform. A half-dressed woman or two appeared and was sent back. When a man put up a fight he was handcuffed, but ordinarily they merely searched him for weapons and kept

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him within the narrowing circle of soldiers.

My wife came running in from the house and nearly fainted at what she saw, but the smiling Hurakaro, whom she knew as a would-be mining-operator, reassured her some by explaining matters and telling her that nothing whatever would happen to any Americans who accepted the situation. It hadn't occurred to us to be badly frightened on that score; these little fellows were so polite and businesslike and smiling, just like they are when they are good servants.

ABOUT this time my key began calling me from that cage thing, and it called till I itched all over to answer it. Then Sitka told Seattle that they couldn't raise me, and what Seattle said in reply must have been something forcible, for Sitka began calling again like mad. Then Sitka got Valdez, and he began the Seward call till I was all in a perspiration. Hurakaro kept smiling at me as if he knew just what was happening, and, sure enough, he did, being, as I learned in due time, a first-class operator.

Hurry (for I might as well give him my nickname for him; he always seemed to like it, and it's shorter)—well, Hurry, he was a brick. I'd managed to do him quite a few little favors, and one Sunday I mushed twenty miles with him to look at a prospect. He seemed to think it was an honor, though I afterward found out he was a general or a major or something, and we had a long talk on religion and things, as men will on the trail. So we got real chummy. That's how I came to call him Hurry.

Well, that morning, when things broke loose, Hurry told me that we were to keep the cottage, though if we had any neighbors we were particularly friendly with we might put them up "as a favor." He had the frau go back to fix my breakfast, and darned if she didn't ask him to join us. Now wasn't that clever? And Hurry accepted with a bird of a bow and a full-fledged blush, though he seemed to be the whole works with the army.

Every house, including ours, and all the stores were searched for weapons, ammunition and explosives, and these were collected and put under guard. Otherwise things were left pretty much alone. A lot of the men were garrisoned in the railroad's big office-building that had never been used for much of anything, others took the hotels and bunk-houses, and the white population was considerably concentrated. Seward always had had a surplus of cabins since the boom in 1905, and they came in handy, for these Japs just seemed to swarm. The funny thing to me was that the stores weren't seized, but the storekeepers were told to go on doing business. The banks were closed and guarded, though.

I, it seems, was to have the torture of being allowed to stick by my key without being able to touch it. This was Hurry's happy thought, and it was a lot of comfort during the long idle days that followed after they had given up trying to raise me. It kept us in touch with the big things that were going on outside until the Japs took Valdez.

The whole town was paroled, which it might be safely enough, as there wasn't any place to escape to except the empty hills. We were as helpless as so many wooden toys.

When things got settled down a bit Hurry came and asked me to walk around town with him. He was evidently a little proud of his work, and he even condescended to tell me something about it.

Gee, that was one busy town! Here it was only six hours after the first troops were landed and my key caged and there was more doing than 1905 ever dreamed of.

Down at the wharf a big transport was unloading coolies at the rate of fifty a minute. Hurry said cheerfully that there were "about ten thousand in this first shipment." As they came ashore they were told off in squads to all sorts of duty. Most of them were set to carrying up dunnage and supplies; several hundred, evidently carpenters, were repairing and building cabins and bunk-houses. A big gang was rushed up to the railroad-yards and began overhauling everything, from rolling-stock to old rails.

You never saw anything like the way that town grew. It was twice its natural size in twenty-four hours. They seemed to know every foot of the ground, too, for which I guess they had to thank the artistic Mr. Hurry with his little camera and his smiling eye for native Alaskan scenery.

Organization! My name! That United States Steel Preferred couldn't have touched it. Ten thousand men on strange ground in a town built for two thousand, and not a loose end, not an hour's wait!

By ten in the morning the bay was dotted

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with fishing-boats and a whole cargo of rice was under cover on the wharfs. Your Oriental diet may be a joke, but it has its advantages in war, especially with a bay full of halibut and red snapper, *et cetera*, like Seward has.

WELL, while I was inspecting things with Colonel Hurry—I think it was colonel—and how he could saunter around and snap quiet orders at every man that ran up, without interrupting the conversation!—there was a noise like big guns down the bay, and I got sort of trembly.

"What are they bombarding, Hurry?" I asked, trying to make a sort of joke of it.

"That is merely what you call a little rock-work for the fortifications," he said serenely.

"Fortifications?" I gasped.

"Certainly, Mistaire Logan, the Japanese will have the honor of fortifying 'the Alaskan Gibraltar,' which you must yourself admit has been rather neglected by your honorable Government." That was the kind of English Hurry always handed out.

But now I saw the whole plan, and it was confirmed by my Japanese friend's answers to my questions. A fleet of transports and freighters, convoyed by only three battle-ships, had sailed into our unprotected Alaskan coast and had calmly seized this impregnable Resurrection Bay to use it as their base of operations.

You know the way the mouth of the bay lies. It isn't half a mile wide and its rocky gates are veritable Gibraltars, while inside is hidden anchorage for the biggest fleet afloat. Any merchantman would walk right into this trap as innocently as a mouse, and a battery could be set on any one of a dozen high points that would pour explosive projectiles down on the decks of any number of dreadnoughts without being in the least danger.

So now this very thing—which our experts, I understand, had pointed out months ago—was being done by an enemy. I grew hot at the thought and, for the instant, I could gladly have throttled the genial little friend beside me. He was a conspirator against my country, and his genius was helping to make possible a deadly war in which thousands of my people would sacrifice their lives. As I turned on him I saw that he had read my thought, but his smile did not waver, though his eyes were sad.

"It would be useless, Mistaire Logan," he said. "It would all go on just the same without us. This war is a business, or perhaps what you call a game. It is not for killing, but to win the game. I think now perhaps I am more a mining-man at heart. That is a game, too. But this is a very much bigger one—an end game."

Hurry and I had battled over the chessboard many an evening and I saw the point. Maybe it was loony of me. I don't know what you will think of me. But I held out my hand and he took it. A fellow couldn't help liking that little chap personally.

Anyway, that didn't prevent my refusing him pointblank to give any key to the code-messages that were coming in over the cable or his threatening to have me shot if I didn't—in front of two subordinates—and his patting me on the shoulder when he had sent them away.

"You are right, Mistaire Logan," he said, "and I guess it is not that sort of a game."

Interesting messages those were to us in Seward, even though I could only guess what most of them meant. It was clear enough, however, that the real Japanese fleet had been seen hovering off the California coast, that the Pacific cities were in a panic, that Hawaii had been taken, and that there was only a thirty-days' supply of navy coal on the Coast for the Pacific squadron. It was also evident that the taking of Seward was unknown, though half suspected.

Of particular interest to us was a press-despatch saying that a howl of execration had been raised against the Government throughout the country because the Alaska coal, for which there was now so pressing a need, had been neither protected nor drawn upon for our protection. We Alaskans, in the middle of all this mix-up, laughed for days at this. It was a bitter kind of joke, but it was a joke just the same. The East had come to its senses at last, but it had taken a national disaster to bring it around. Certainly the coal it had fought to save for its "posterity" was lost to it for good.

And it was this coal of ours that our Japanese visitors, as we called them, were evidently after. Hurry would not tell me much about the Japanese plans in Alaska, but kept saying:

"Be patient and you will see many things."

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We saw some queer ones all right in the next few days.

FIRST off, in came a big Japanese freighter and out came a whole darned cargo of steel rails, mile after mile of them. The railroad—Alaska Northern, you know—had been got to running in no time. There was still a lot of ice and snow, but you can do a good deal with ten thousand men, and these were sent out along the line as fast as it was opened. Track was laid to Mile 72 in 1910, you remember, and that was about a hundred miles from the Matanuska coal fields, so the Japs had a big job ahead of them. Luckily for them much of the heavy rock-work around Turnagain Arm had been done and there was a lot of grading beyond.

But at that they did wonders. Just to keep the camps in supplies was a big job, and how they ever came to make that hundred and more miles in sixty days beats me. But they did it, as you know, working night and day without a let-up, and had a supply of coal ready-mined when they got there and a fleet of colliers waiting for it in Seward with battle-ships to convoy them to the fleet.

The joke of it was that they didn't need it after all, because they were able to hold the coast to the eastward as far as the Bering River fields, and were able to reach these fields and send out coal nearly two weeks before the western field was tapped. But this is getting ahead of the story.

Things were moving so fast in Seward that without Hurry's visits to the office and my occasional excursions with him I should never have been able to keep track of them.

The fortifications of the bay, heavy and difficult as this work must have been, were completed in amazingly short time, but no American vessels had come to argue with the invisible batteries on the rocks. Several coastwise steamers had dropped innocently into the bay, to be quietly captured, their wireless dismantled, their small boats all taken from them, their cargoes and coal-bunkers drawn on at need for the fleet and the town.

It was nearly two weeks after Seward's first visitation, and the alarm along the coast was growing daily by reason of the lack of news from steamers or from me, when the next important step took place.

I got up early that morning and went out to the office. Force of habit, I suppose. And what do you think? The cage was gone, and a little soldier-fellow was sending—on my key. He stopped and something began to come in and—it was in Japanese! I got "VZ" at the end and guessed it was Valdez.

Then Cordova broke in, and I'll be darned if it wasn't in Japanese, too. I knew what that meant. Alaska—the whole blooming 600,000 miles—was as good as captured. Alaska, "the nation's treasure-house," as those writer fellows call it, was a Japanese possession. Of course, the coast here isn't the whole of Alaska by a long shot, but it's the key. The rest was theirs for the taking. Bering Sea was a month from the break-up, and the whole interior couldn't muster ten thousand men in two months. What show had they against this swarm of Japs that just went ahead and did whatever they wanted?

Of course, cable-connections had been cut south of Cordova, as the enemy needed the coast-line. And they kept her humming. I couldn't make head or tail of the messages—just a word here and there. Then the third day my call came with a familiar touch. I knew it in a flash for Dave Smith at Cordova and my hand went out. Then I remembered and looked around, feeling sort of foolish. There was Hurry, of course, and grinning as usual.

"I think maybe perhaps you would like to speak with your friend Mistaire Smith," says the old fox.

"I sure would," says I.

"Arright," says he in his military voice, and walks out.

I answered the call.

"Are you captured?" asked Dave.

"Sure!" I sent back. "Are you?"

"Of course," said Dave. "Thursday P. M. Easiest thing you know. Picked me off first and cut us off south. Filled the town full of coolies and rice. Seized the railroad and it looks like they're going to build to the coal-fields. Something doing sure. Town says anyway we'll get use of some of that coal at last. Wonder why they let us talk."

I could have answered that, but I didn't know how long we could have the wire, so I told him what had happened in Seward and was getting more details when Carleson at Valdez broke in.

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"Hello, fellows," says he. "Have you been captured?"

"We have," we both called together.

CARLESON had an interesting story and a sad one. Valdez was as easily captured as Seward, but Fort Liscum, across the bay, was a different matter. There were United States regulars, and, though they were far outnumbered, they refused to surrender. The Japanese gunboats could have razed the fort with fifteen minutes of firing, but instead they fired into the hills behind the fort and under its cover landed a big force lower down in an effort to overpower the Americans without a fight. But they did not succeed; our men, well entrenched, putting up a stiff one. It just couldn't last, though, and the result was a lot of our boys killed and wounded and nearly twice as many Japanese.

Valdez was taken the same day as Cordova, and it was already apparent in both places that the invaders intended to repeat their Seward game. They didn't want Alaska for its strategic value alone. They had another trick up their wily Oriental sleeves. They had begun a fight to the finish with the United States, and they were going to finance it from the American treasure-house. Alaska was to furnish the sinews of war.

So the Japanese transports came with machinery and men and went back empty till the coal was tapped, and, working inland—building roads and bridges as they went—soon had the pick of the gold-fields.

What they didn't know in advance about our placer-grounds wasn't much, either, thanks to Hurry and his partners in crime. Some of them had worked as cooks in every camp in Alaska worth mentioning, and had collected some little information in off-moments, as it were.

So the Japs knew just where to go and what to do. Where the Americans had worked a claim with ten men at five dollars a day, the yellow fellows put on a hundred at about ten cents. And they didn't pack in any canned peaches for them either.

But one thing they did do that was what I call clever. They brought over a cargo of up-to-date farm-machinery, and they started ranches wherever there was a good valley near mines. Around Knik, on Cook Inlet, where there was quite some farming already, and up the Matanuska Valley, toward the coal-mines where the homesteading began in 1910, they had hundreds of acres cleared and planted with vegetables and grain before the end of May. You can lay all you have they knew what they were about. You ought to see those blooming ranches now. Mr. Jap will have green stuff till New Year's anyway, and the best there is at that.

Well, we thought we were pretty smart when we beat the record and produced twenty millions in gold last year without our coal. But that wasn't a circumstance. Of course, we all knew the gold was there, but we didn't know it was good for any seventy millions a year as it looks now. And the coal! It always did look like a pretty good thing, given half a chance, even if the formation is badly broken up. But those Japanese with their cheap labor have been shipping it out at a rate that makes us Americans look silly. They're working the copper-mines, too, and have started on some of the silver-lead products. I bet they'll be killing us with Alaskan bullets before snow flies in the mountains.

Well, they've got us and they'll hold us as long as they want to. With a couple of gunboats guarding Cook Inlet to the westward, Resurrection Bay fortified against any sort of attack and a strong patrol in Prince William Sound, there isn't much chance for us. Even if our people did land in force at one point, they would have to fight their way into every other part of a rough country that has a hundred thousand fighting-men in it.

There is just one weak spot that I can see. That's Cook Inlet. They could probably beat any American fleet to it, but if they didn't and we had a strong force, we might land at the mouth of Kenai River on Kenai Peninsula, work our way up to the railroad, cut that off and come down on Seward from behind. At that we wouldn't have the gunboats or the fortifications, but we might blockade the mouth of Resurrection Bay and starve them out.

You see, it's a slim chance, and we would have our friend Hurry to deal with. Hurry was still on the job when I left, and he seemed real sorry to see me go. They were sending out a shipload of the women on the Northwestern, and this interior of mine needed some more expert doctoring than Seward could offer. It was really

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Hurry who sent me, though he said as I went aboard:

"Perhaps, after all, I should detain you, Mistaire Logan, for you are a philosophaire, and I shall, maybe, be in great need of a philosophical friend here."

Funny cuss, Hurry—for a Jap. I don't think he loves the North like we sourdoughs do.

But I'm glad to be outside, even if there is as much miscellaneous yellow peril on the job down here as there is in poor old Alaska. Lord, how she has changed!

Now it's your turn. I'm hungry for some real news. Tell me about the battle of San Francisco Bay.

Is it true that the Japs had tunneled under every one of the transcontinental roads at the mountain-summits and, when the word came, blew gorges through the right of way? Haven't we made any headway at all in the attack from the desert? Somebody said it would take at least a year to get through. Do you suppose those little beggars had guns already up there to fortify the passes? And how much of our coal did they capture in the blockade of the mountain-roads? Haven't we held a single port or island on the Pacific? And in Heaven's name how much of our fleet have they bottled up in the Panama Canal?

You see, I haven't even the beginning of the big story; but, gee! hasn't it all worked out just as we said it would! Now come across with the whole story.

A FIVE-O'CLOCK SOLDIER

By Thomas Samson Miller

THE officers at Lokoja, lounging in hammock-chairs, were in the midst of the nightly "after-chop" Niger gossip. The discovery that Low, the Company's investigator, was setting out in the morning to uncover the mystery of the disappearance of Byron Holroyd naturally turned the conversation to his mission. Low himself did not join in the discussion, preferring to be a close listener in the hope of picking up a chance clue.

The canteen-officer opined that Holroyd had got into "trouble" with a native chief and had been cracked on the head. To this the depot-agent objected that the youth was too sensitive of others' feelings and, besides, had always got along well with Africans. Then the agent in charge got into the discussion, in the heavy way of one whose head is old with experience and carries the weight of responsibility.

"There's more behind Byron's disappearance than chance accident. Several little incidents happened here, nothing of themselves, but collectively they hint at something—oh——"

He hesitated for the right expression—for men long used to the solitudes of Niger trading-stations gradually lose conversational powers—and in the end gave up the attempt to put his meaning into words.

"Well, I'll tell you a few things I noticed, and perhaps you can dig out the story for yourselves; anyway, it might help Low to get his bearings. Pass the decanter, boy,

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and now the sparklet-bottle; this night is like a baker's oven."

He sighed and poured out a whisky.

"I suppose most of you remember the boy for the way he used to sing, in that alto of his, 'Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes,' and his readiness for any kind of frolic. At first I thought it was romance that had sent him out here, but later I began to see that it was the old story of trouble at home, for the boy would drop from his high spirits into brooding melancholy as quickly as tornadoes come out of blue skies when the rains are due.

"The first hint I got that there was something not what it should be was when the mail-canoe came in one night and we were all acting like kids with new fairy-story books, Byron more of the kid than any of us, as is the way when you are fresh to exile. I had fallen somewhat in the way of watching the boy. There was something about his cheerfulness and his handsome young face that was good to dwell upon. Then, too, when he developed the moody streaks I watched him, as one gets to watching newcomers, for the signs—for fever, homesickness, or the demoralization which finally comes if an older officer is not close by to give a word or two of advice.

"AS HE ripped his meager mail you could read the very thoughts in his face. Plainly I read relief, until he came to his papers, when a look of fear started into his eyes. The paper was the *Daily Telegraph* and I made up my mind to scan my own *Daily Telegraph* pretty close to see what the boy had to jump at.

"But Byron was as wise as they make them. After the first shock of his discovery in the paper's columns he collected his mail together. Then he began scanning the newspapers scattered about the balcony, until his eyes lighted on my copy of the *Telegraph*, and I read his intention to swipe it right away. Ordinarily I suppose I would have waited and caught him in the act, but there was something repugnant to me in the boy's attempt—a feeling that the act would soil my conception of his fine character. Perhaps, also, I felt a wish to spare his conscience. So I forestalled him by gathering my mail and papers and going to my room. It was not idle inquisitiveness that made me scan my *Daily Telegraph* very closely so much as a feeling that if I knew Byron's trouble I might be able to give an older man's advice, for there was something appealing about the boy. You all must admit that; indeed you did tacitly admit it when you held over your off-color *bon mots* until he had left the circle.

"I went through the columns of my paper item by item, discovering but the barest possible connection with the boy in an item which stated that a painting by a great artist of a certain Col. Byron Holroyd, a hero of the Indian Mutiny, had recently been discovered by a second-hand dealer and was now for sale. The painting, it seems, bore a medallion setting forth that it had been publicly presented to the colonel by the gentry and villagers of Little Framley.

"The obvious question that intruded itself was, what sent the descendant of a man of that standing out here to be a negro-driver? Again, why was the boy so anxious to hide that apparently innocent news-item from us that he would descend to petty theft?

"I got a partial answer in another paper, where the widow of the colonel, through her lawyers, sought to restrain the sale of the portrait on the grounds that it was entailed property and unsalable. Anyway, she said, it had been stolen. Her son, it appears, had forwarded the picture from the family residence to a safety-vault in London and it had disappeared on the way.

"But the second-hand dealer put in evidence a sale-note signed by Byron Holroyd, for a consideration of two thousand pounds, and a declaration of his right to the picture.

"So the boy had raised two thousand on entailed property in which he had only a life interest, and before the law was guilty of grand larceny! At least that was the obvious deduction.

"But I could not believe that the boy we knew, the boy who sang 'Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes' like that, could be deliberately guilty of a theft that so soiled the family honor. The boy had pride. You perhaps remember he positively refused to travel in the same canoe with the half-caste agent at Igobo when he set out on this journey in which he got himself lost. Well, I had a good clue to his trouble, but it was of such a nature that I could not broach it to him and invite healing confidences, though I felt certain there were

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extenuating circumstances—a story behind the necessity for that two thousand pounds.

"The boy took his disgrace very much to heart, for all through the night I heard his restless movements in his room next to mine. In building these places with a view to free air-currents the designers had no thought for one's sleep when the man the other side of the thin partition is suffering conscience-pangs, so about midnight I knocked on the boards and told the boy to put out his light and get abed. He put out the light, but I waited vainly for the creak of his bed-springs.

"SOMEHOW I could not sleep myself for thought of his unhappiness, so after tossing around a while I slipped on my mosquito-moccasins and walked round the balcony to his room. He was sitting in the semi-dark, staring through the open door at the Niger, so lost in thought that I touched his shoulder ere he was aware of my presence. Of course I lectured him on the fever-risks he took and all that, and, of course, my lecture had no effect whatever.

"I struck a match to his hurricane-lamp, and made a curious discovery. In each hand he held a lieutenant's shoulder-strap with a single silver star; evidently his commission had been in the volunteers, and it explained at once that soldierly bearing—that swing of his when he crossed the compound and his sharp way of giving orders to the blacks.

"If ever a boy needed a friend, Byron did that night; but how to get behind his pride? Yet I could not leave him there to brood; not when the fever-season is due and one wants every atom of cheerfulness to fight malaria. While I was debating the question a launch whistled from the river and I seized the incident to stir the boy out of himself, telling him to come with me to the river and see who was arriving.

"It proved to be Loader, on his way to take over Jebba. He was just back from three months of roast beef and felt gay enough to let us all know he was back. Also he wanted a case of whisky. I called to Byron, who had followed me to the bank, but not aboard, to go and get the key from the canteen-officer. Then Loader and myself went over to the canteen and waited.

"The boy came there briskly, but suddenly stopped dead, staring into Loader's face. The latter was no less astonished, but nothing can put George Loader out of countenance, or he'd have reformed long ago. He laughed, then saluted the youth sneeringly.

" 'Hullo,' he said, 'it's the Little Five O'Clock Soldier.'

"If I had not just surprised the boy with the epaulets in his hands I might have wondered at the effect of that sneer on his citizen-soldiership; as it was I was not surprised to see him fling the key straight into Loader's face and with livid face walk for the house. The canteen-key weighs maybe six ounces, and Loader's face was a sight. But he had brought the trouble on himself and I told him plainly that as far as Lokoja was concerned the thing must end right there, gave his 'boy' the case of whisky and saw the launch away.

"Next morning I had a long talk with the boy—pointed out the folly of his action, that one of these days he would find himself sub-agent to Loader in a lonely station, or perhaps living under the same tent. Byron replied that he could take care of himself with Loader in any situation, that the other had wronged him once and was not likely to get another chance, adding with bitter emphasis:

" 'I would teach him that there's something to a "Five O'Clock Soldier." '

"Well, there it is. Recently the boy sets out for Shonga, the last station before Jebba, and drops out of sight. But I think he is very much alive somewhere."

Low, who had not lost a word, shot his head forward, speaking for the first time.

"You think Holroyd turned down his orders and made for Jebba? But if that were the case we should have heard long ago."

"I don't exactly know what I think. I know the boy had an old grudge against Loader. I know too that after Loader left he was very curious about Jebba. He discovered that it was dominated by the Houssa tribe and then he set out to learn the language. Then, too, he formed the acquaintanceship of an ex-sergeant of the Niger Constabulary, a Houssa, with whom he made fast friends, so much so that the sergeant forgot his caste pride and prejudices to the extent of accompanying the boy as servant."

"There must have been a very strong bond between them, then," said Low.

"Sure, the bond of old soldiers; they'd sit

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out under the baobabs by the hour, the old sergeant telling over his fights. Perhaps there was also another bond—the bond of fellow conspirators. I've got the idea fixed that Byron was planning to get to Jebba and at Loader. It is evident from the latter's recognition of the youth that they had met in England, where, judging from the boy's rage, he had suffered injury at Loader's hands. As we all know, Loader has not a very clean record."

THE chance conversation gave unexpected clues to Low's investigation and something to con on the tedious river-journey to Shonga, whither Byron Holroyd had been sent. The agent there could not help much. He simply said that he had seen a white man pass in a canoe near sundown about two months ago.

"I waved to him," the agent explained, "for I thought perhaps he did not know a white man was in charge here, while if it was my assistant whose helmet I saw above the gunwales he was perhaps unaware that he was passing Shonga. But instead of answering my signal his canoemen put on extra speed, so I thought there was trouble up at Jebba and the white was under quick orders. Later I received an inquiry from Lokoja as to why I held the canoe by which my sub-agent was supposed to have come, and then I knew there was something wrong. I sent the Lokoja runner on to Jebba, but he returned with Loader's message that the canoe had not arrived there."

"Well, what's your opinion?"

"The boy must have got into trouble with his canoemen and found a swift end. The blacks probably fled to bush, or maybe are hiding at one of the many little villages between here and Jebba."

With this meager information Low took up the trail, stopping at every little village and questioning the chiefs about any strangers in the district, until he got word of a score of Kru paddlemen hiding at a village that straddled a small stream off the north bank of the Niger.

The information proved correct. By sneaking craftily along under cover of the mangroves Low was able to surprise the village before his quarry could get away. He rounded up the natives at the point of his revolver, then had the head-man on the carpet. The poor wretch, frightened by Low's stern expression, trembled and cast his eyes on the ground.

"Look up—look me in the face," Low snapped. "Now, answer me. Where is the young massa you brought from Lokoja?"

The black answered thickly in his throat, "Gone, sah."

"Gone? Gone where? How?"

"The debils of the forest done eat him up," the fellow answered, and his men repeated in guttural chorus, "The debils of the forest done eat him up."

"You lie," snapped Low, closely watching the negro's face for the effect of the charge. "Don't you give me any of that devil-talk, or you'll taste hippo-thong."

But the negro shook his mastiff head and swore the dreadful oath of the Krumen.

"IF I LIE, then may I never have son, and may I die by ju-ju and my spirit haunt the forests forever," he impressively repeated, convincing Low that his talk of devils was not an invention.

"What do you mean by devils? What were they like?" he demanded. "Tell me how the massa done go."

The negro was only too willing to tell and clear himself.

"It am all same like this, sah. We come to Jebba, maybe an hour off. The massa order the canoe to the bank. Him get out with Issou, the Houssa. Both take guns and go into the forest, where the debils with tails live."

"Ah, you mean baboons."

"That am what white man call 'em, maybe, but when the good Ju-Ju (God) make man the debil ju-ju think he am just as smart and make men with tails. They done eat the young massa up."

"Why didn't you go to Jebba and tell?"

"We done be scared that the white man say we kill the young massa and steal him goods."

"But you had the goods left in the canoe?"

"No, sah; the young massa and Issou take mos' everything with them."

"Ah," cried Low involuntarily, seeing in this a confirmation of the view of the agent at Lokoja that Holroyd and Issou were plotting; for in taking goods with them it was evident that they had meant to desert the canoes.

With what intention? Low asked himself, and the only answer he saw was some

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design on Jebba and Loader, unless the inexperienced youth was the victim of a plot of Issou's to get him into the bush and murder him for the goods.

TO ATTEMPT to pick up a two-months-old trail was useless, so there was nothing for it but to push on to Jebba and get on the scent perhaps from there. An hour's hard paddling brought him to the trading-station at sweltering high-noon. A single watchman asleep standing was the only being sighted by Low as he crossed the silent compound to the living-house over the sheet-iron barter-store. He whistled as he climbed the gangway that Loader might not complain of stealthy approach. Passing through the chop-room he found the agent in a bath-robe on a Madeira couch in deep sleep while a negro fanned the flies from his face with a palm-leaf. A whisky-bottle beside the couch told the story.

Repressing his disgust, Low called Loader by name. The agent sat bolt upright, staring stupidly. Then his sallow face flushed guiltily at being caught in noonday debauchery. A scar on his right cheek, left there by the canteen-key, reddened nastily. He snapped out viciously:

"You've got a rotten job, Low, if you have to sneak on a man like this."

Low kept his head and temper.

"I whistled loud enough to wake the dead. If you kept any kind of watch, your men would have sighted my canoe an hour ago," he said. Not wishing to antagonize the man further he frankly explained his errand.

Loader's surprise seemed genuine.

"What! Is he lost?"

"Dropped completely out of sight. He was sent to Shonga as sub-agent, but got adventuresome and tackled the forests," Low explained, and went on to tell so much of the story as to give Loader the idea it was simply a case of foolish adventure into the forest. Nevertheless he was watching his man closely. As he went on with his account he noticed a curious expression of relief in Loader's face, as if the boy's fate or at least Low's interpretation of it took a load off his mind.

Loader gave his opinion freely.

"It's just a case of a kid being fed up with tales by this rascal Issou and going off in search of romance or some fairy-story wealth. The boy was starving for romance."

"Then you have met Holroyd?" Low said with a great show of surprise.

Loader chuckled and pushed the whisky-bottle toward Low, settling himself to tell a story. Low declined the liquor with the remark that he never drank before five o'clock. Loader caught at the last word.

"Like the 'Little Five O'Clock Soldier' only played war after business hours, after he got away from bank and his rustic privates laid down their saws and hammers and put on valiant red coats. But you're looking mighty curious as to how I know so much about Holroyd. It's quite a little tale. If you don't mind me whetting my tongue without your company I'll amuse you with it."

HE POURED out a stiff drink, and then carelessly related his acquaintance with Holroyd, with certain reservations that Low, long practised in studying expressions, knew covered some rascality. Loader talked lazily, careless of the connections between his short sentences.

"It was 'way back on my last home trip. I found myself in Little Framley, putting up at the Dolphin—a comfortable old hostelry that had escaped the march of the telephone, scientific heating, brass bedsteads and cocktails; nothing but straight liquor and oil lamps; mighty restful sort of place after Africa, and about the cut of my finances. I liked the billiard-room—managed to pay my liquor-bill by playing a shilling a game with the young farmers.

"One night in came a youngster, bravely togged as a first lieutenant of the local volunteers, and he got me upset right off by the way he bossed the show—the way the billiard-marker, the hostler and even the proprietor fawned on him. I thought at first it was money; but the boy was cashier at the village bank and counted every shilling as we count pounds.

"Lord, it was just *family*. Ever buck that *family* proposition? Ever drop into a village where one family dominates the show like the *serekai* (chief) of that village outside the compound? It exasperated me—made me wonder what *I* could do if *I* had family. It galled me to see his snug comfort, and I laid to tumble him from his high estate.

"Oh, it was easy—just a few stories of

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the Niger, wonders of imagination, and myself the hero in a hundred escapades, and the kid was glad to lose his shillings on the billiard-table to one who knew real war, had killed—the Lord alone knows how many savages I did kill.

"I got an invitation to his home—seventeenth-century manor and a nice old dame in a lace-cap who mothered the youth and gave yours truly the kind of courtesy you read of in old-fashioned novels. She sat down on a household of antiques worth a small fortune, and lived on weak soup and crackers, for, bless you, they had only the boy's salary and the rental of three cottages to make their play on.

"The boy aspired to be a real soldier, but lacked the funds, though heir to all those entailed antiques, as if he were a museum janitor."

Loader paused in a reminiscent mood, then took a black cigar from his case and laughingly continued his sneering picture of the antiquated manor.

"It irritated me to see the boy so snug and I set out to put discontent into his silly head, telling him what riches he could get if he raised a little coin on his antiques and tried the Niger, which, of course, he could not legally do. But his ambition for a commission in the real army was, I fancy, greater than his fear of the law, and it looks as if he tried my scheme and got into trouble, or else how comes he out here?

LOW'S mind went back to the episode at Lokoja, where the boy had flung the canteen-keys in Loader's face, and he knew that the man was withholding some rascality. It was on his tongue to tell of the newspaper paragraph anent the portrait of Col. Holroyd and see how Loader took the information, but on second thought he found it wiser to keep the man ignorant of his knowledge and watch events. He tried another tack.

"I heard talk at Lokoja of some trouble you had with Holroyd," he said, with a show of casualness.

Loader's hand went at once to his scar and he flared out.

"He left his mark on me, and if ever I lay hands on him he'll carry my mark to his grave."

"What was the trouble? But excuse me, that's none of my business."

Loader accepted the apology and coolly disregarding the question, turned his head to steps climbing the gangway. Low also turned. He saw a Houssa kick off his sandals on the balcony, and come on through the "chop-room," as if he were a privileged visitor. Surprised at the man's infraction of the rule that forbids any blacks other than the house-boys in the white man's quarters, he looked to see Loader angrily order the man off. Instead he surprised the agent in the act of signaling caution with his eyes. Loader, seeing that he was caught, attempted to bluff the situation.

"This is an interesting old rascal who comes up from the desert with yarns of jinn and miraculous appearances that make 'The Arabian Nights' a back number," he invented.

Then he turned to the Houssa, telling him to come some other time, when he was not engaged. Low saw him exchange a meaning glance with the man, who saluted by touching his turban, swung round and walked away. Something in the man's gait struck Low. He went to the edge of the balcony, ostensibly to flick the ash from his smoke, really to watch the man cross the compound.

What he saw confirmed his suspicion that the man was not a desert Houssa, for he did not carry his body like the desert men, with a forward slope, the feet scarcely lifted from the ground, but walked with chest out, stomach in, and feet flung like a soldier. Many a time had Low seen the drill-sergeant bullying raw Houssa levies into that step; he could not be mistaken.

The instantaneous question that projected itself was whether this was Sergeant Issou in disguise? If so, was Loader aware of it? What was the secret bond between the two and what relation did the discovery have to his investigation into the disappearance of Holroyd? He turned to Loader, to see if his observation was noticed, and found the pistachio-green eyes of the agent fixed on him with a kind of uneasiness, which permeated his first remark.

"I suppose you'll hang round here until you pick up a clue, or satisfy yourself there's nothing more to this boy's disappearance than a cut-throat trap of Issou's or a swifter death by baboons?"

Low replied briefly, "I expect to pick up the trail here—in the village perhaps. I'll go over and do a little prospecting, when the sun is tolerable."

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"All right," said Loader, affecting a yawn. "There's a spare room and—— But there goes the tom-tom for afternoon muster; excuse me." He flung his words over his shoulder as he descended to the compound.

It was very evident that Low's unexpected arrival had jarred some scheme of Loader's. But what? And had it any connection with the disappearance of Holroyd?

THE first move was to unmask the identity of the supposed desert Houssa, so when the sun dropped toward the west Low took a stroll through the humming village, by good fortune coming on the Houssa as he was purchasing plantains and mealies of a mammy. A thing that struck Low instantly was that the man bartered with bandannas, which he recalled was on the list given him of Holroyd's goods. Convinced now that the Houssa was Issou, he waited until the black had made his bargain. Then Low walked up behind him, and flung out a sharp order.

" 'Tention!"

The man straightened, stopped dead with military precision, and had half swung round on his heels before he recalled himself. Then he dropped back into his character of desert Houssa and swung on as if he had not heard. Low knew too well the stubbornness of the Houssa character to arrest the sergeant and try third-degree methods. Instead he contented himself with watching from where he stood the fellow's direction, which was toward some yam-fields bordering the village. Thence he took to the mimosa scrub and was lost to view.

Returning to the compound, Low slipped a revolver into his hip-pocket, and asked Loader for permission to use the horse, saying that he would like a canter before "chop." Loader assented rather ungraciously. As Low made a move toward the stables he snapped out the remark that there were plenty of blacks around who would get the horse and a white man need not wait on himself. Low, his senses alert to every thought behind his host's expressions, made a mental note to see on the first opportunity what secret the stable hid. Meantime, however, he waited for the negro to bring the horse.

He cantered out to the village, dropped to a walk across the yam-fields and thence proceeded softly over a sandy trail where the sergeant's sandals led the way. His mount's unshod hoofs struck the soft sands without a sound, even in that curiously penetrating tropical stillness.

SUDDENLY the quiet was broken by the twanging notes of some gut instrument, and the next moment a clear, thin, alto voice broke into that centuries-old song, "Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes," with a pathos that brought Low to a standstill, his heart poised to the very soul of romance. He had found Holroyd.

Before the song ended he seemed to know the youth as if they were old, old friends. A spell stole over him—not merely the spell of music, not merely the spell of the familiar words, but the spell of the young voice and the spell of the old world. As the last note quivered lingeringly in the air he woke out of himself and came back to Africa.

The voice had risen from a clump of wild figs in a small hollow. Low experienced a strong disinclination to surprise the youth by riding down abruptly. Instead he rode back a little way, turned and advanced again, whistling shrilly, toward the fig trees.

He came on a goatskin tent and rude camp. Over an earthen pot swung above a wood fire bent Issou, while in the tent-opening squatted a figure in burnoose and turban with a gourd strung with catgut on his knees. The figure rose at his approach and clumsily affected the Houssa stately salute. Next moment Low found himself looking into a pair of gray eyes flecked with violet and a face as dark as a strong dilution of permanganate of potash might make it. Almost he could have laughed at the boy's thin disguise, if there had not been something so pathetic in its possible cause, and in the contrasting pictures that rose to Low's mind—first the petted young officer of Little Framley, then the wandering outcast chasing revenge.

A mischievous notion to test the boy's pride made him spur his horse up close, dismount and fling the reins to him. But Holroyd pointed to Issou, saying in poor Houssa, "Let my servant attend." Issou sprang into the breach, thereby proving his great love for the youth—a love that transcended caste-pride.

For a moment Low wavered, undecided whether or not to keep up the play and indulge himself in a little detective foraging. But another look into those gray eyes made

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him ashamed to trick the youth further. Suddenly he laughed and held out his hand.

"Holroyd, Holroyd!" he gulped.

The next moment they were hand-locked in fellowship. For a while they stood thus. Low was the first to speak.

"You've given me a nice dance, youngster; I am Low, of the Company, out hunting for you. What's the game? Come; I'm your friend. Believe that and tell me the trouble. You're after Loader."

"How did you know?" cried the youth aghast. Quickly he added, "I'm not doing anything wrong—really. If you knew everything! You won't give me away?" he pleaded.

"I'll do what I can, if you are frank with me. I have a duty to perform, and if we can agree without dereliction of that duty you won't find me a hard man. Loader did you an injury in the old country; eh?"

"He used me badly," emphatically. "And now he is using the company badly. But if you will let me alone, if you will refrain from spoiling my plans, he will get his deserts and everything will be settled. But if you interfere now you will ruin everything, and I—" he choked, but mastered his emotion and finished—"and I will never be able to clear up the family disgrace."

"Family pride, eh, boy? But hadn't you better let me in on your plot?"

"Oh, I can't, I can't! You might disagree. You might think it is impossible. All my honor is involved. I simply *must* carry this through. Can't you just wait and watch?" he begged, his eyes appealing with all their power.

Low began dubiously. "I don't know—you're young, and Loader is experienced, and——"

The boy broke in impetuously.

"You don't know how old a wrong can make one. You don't know how I have sweated this thing out—how Issou and I have talked and talked until our plan is perfect. You don't know what it is to center all your heart and strength on one thing, or you would not talk like that."

Low suddenly capitulated to the youth's earnestness. "All right, I'll wait and watch with the reservation that I'll take part if I think I ought to. There's my hand on it. But don't forget. I'm watching for all I'm worth, and I take part if I see the necessity."

"That's fair play, Mr. Low," cried Holroyd, gripping the other's hand. "Honest, I'm not doing anything wrong, and perhaps I'm serving the Company. You've treated me fine, Mr. Low, and—and I won't ever forget."

LOW had plenty to think about on his ride back to the trading-compound. His doubt was not of the youth's honesty, but of his ability to outgeneral Loader. Unconsciously he had already assumed an attitude of protection over Holroyd, and it was this that determined him to ferret out the connection between Issou and Loader. To this end he rode in straight for the stable, himself stalling the horse.

Then he quickly looked around.

Stacked in a corner were eight packs. Low took up the top one, carefully judging its weight, which he estimated to be forty pounds, the proper head-load for a bearer. Evidently Loader intended a march, and march through dry country, judging from several water-skins placed by the packs. He would have liked to peep into the packs, but feared discovery by Loader, thus perhaps rendering the man suspicious and causing a change of plan. Hurrying from the stable he went over to the house, where he found the agent in his usual whisky-indulgence on the balcony. He was maudlin, looking for sympathy, declaiming against the service.

"The Company have us by the throat; they know that after we have been out here a few years we're good for nothing else. This country takes the snap out of a man—we're slaves, just slaves. I've sent in my resignation."

"Please yourself," said Low. "But what are you going to do? You haven't saved anything."

"Saved anything! Great Scott! I just about clear my liquor bill. But I'm not worrying—I've a little nest egg to gather."

"Uncle died, or have you thought out an invention that's going to bring in millions?" Low laughed, disguising his tense interest, which was rewarded in Loader's next grumble.

"If it wasn't for that clause in the contract which the Company exact from us—that clause about any discoveries we may make or any rich presents we may receive from a chief or emir—being the property of the Company—I'd have been rich."

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"Maybe you don't know that some of the sheiks up this way boast baubles that would make you or me independent for life, in a moderate way. Because the blacks on the river run 'round naked isn't any argument that their chief doesn't sit on a golden stool. Anyway, up this end of the Niger there are rich sheiks and emirs aplenty—— Have a drink and be companionable."

In the attempt to seduce confidences, Low simulated agreement with Loader's arraignment of the Company, but the other suddenly became cautiously secretive, irrelevantly changing the subject to the difference between crocodiles and alligators. However, he had said enough for Low to arrive at the project hatching in his mind. Undoubtedly he had sent down his resignation that he might free himself of the objectionable clause which stood between him and his legal right to some gift or intended gift. That explained his nervousness on Low's arrival and his eagerness to know how long he intended to remain.

Whatever this gift, or perhaps discovery of some natural wealth, might be, it certainly entailed a journey, and equally certain was the deduction that Sergeant Issou knew the destination and object of that journey. Also it was certain that Loader would make no move so long as Low was at Jebba. The latter made his decision right there.

"It's no good me hanging round here," he said. "Young Holroyd is apparently hopelessly lost and——"

Loader took him up with a callous chuckle.

"Of course he's lost; the hyenas had his bones long ago. Little Five O'Clock Soldiers should not be let away from their mothers' apron strings," he sneered.

Low grinned inwardly, before he finished his interrupted sentence. "——And I'll get back to Lokoja and make my report. There'll be a moon presently, so I'll get off with my canoes right after chop."

Loader's relief was instantaneous. He stirred himself to every effort to speed his unwelcome guest—even accompanying him to the river after dinner. As he flung a good-by at the departing canoes, Low loudly ordered them to mid-stream, making great show of going directly down river. But once he was out of view of the trading-station he ordered the stern-paddlers to steer into the bank and beach about a mile below the village. There he bade them wait his return and pushed through the brush for the camp of Holroyd and Issou.

HE FOUND them on their heels before a camp-fire, the boy listening eagerly to the sergeant's imposing tales. He sprang to his feet when he saw Low, his lips quivering. But Low calmed his fears.

"It's all right. I haven't come to interfere with your plan, but to hurry it by getting myself out of Jebba. Do you know, boy, that Loader is intending a journey?"

Holroyd answered with a mischievous twinkle in his clear eyes. "I should rather say I do know. If things go as they should, Issou and I will be at his destination to receive him."

"Look here, Holroyd, don't attempt more than you can accomplish," Low cautioned.

The other answered with full confidence: "It's Loader who is doing the attempting, and would already have attempted if you had not arrived on the very day he meant to set out. But Issou can go to him tonight and prepare him to start at dawn."

"Start where and for what?"

"That," laughed Holroyd, "is the story. Seeing that I have your promise not to interfere I'll invite you, Mr. Low, to take a three-days' trip with me into the desert and be a witness to the fact that a Five O'Clock Soldier is not a fool."

"You do 't mean to say you're doing all this to get even with Loader for that sneer?"

Holroyd straightened, his eyes flashing, and his answer snapped on the starred solitudes like a shot.

"No; he used me badly—I took him into my home, and he used me badly!" Then he spoke to Issou in Houssa.

"Go, Issou. We will follow your tracks at dawn."

The sergeant saluted and set off toward the trading-station like one who knew what he had to do and disdained unnecessary words.

Low found himself in the curious position of a helpless spectator in a drama of uncertain import. It was the boy who did the ordering now. It was the boy, also, who suggested taking along the canoemen's paddles, as the expedition would not be back for six days and the rascals might get it into their black heads to decamp.

Also he borrowed five of the oarsmen for

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bearers, filled water-skins, selected concentrated food-values from his goods and made preparations for the march with a cautious foresight that relieved Low's fears lest he might attempt more than he could accomplish.

There was a fascination in the boy's alert-mindedness and resource, as when next morning he climbed a tall *alleluba*-tree to spy out Loader's movements, and came down ringing out the order to march. He had redressed into his white man's clothes, with a revolver at his side. Stepping out with military stride, with Low at his right, he led round the village to a trail which entered a suffocating wilderness of arums and cacti. Not far ahead the party struck the footprints of men.

Low suddenly broke the silence.

"We're following Loader?"

"Yes. He is packing eight loads of trade-whisky to a mythical sheik of a mythical town."

"Great Scott! But why—tell me why?"

"The mythical sheik has a mythical mace worth a king's ransom. Oh, you should hear Issou spin his tales," cried the boy with fervor.

"Ah, and with one of Issou's tales you are fooling Loader."

"You're understanding fast."

"Yes, but have you thought of where you stand when Loader meets his Waterloo? Personally I would not care to be the object of his rage."

"Issou and I have that all figured out," said the boy, nor would he vouchsafe further explanation.

LOW was strongly tempted to interfere, but he thought of that mysterious injury which Holroyd had suffered at Loader's hands and decided to let things work out themselves. Besides, the boy had hinted that he was doing the Company a service, and it was certain that Loader was doing something underhand, which, if exposed, would rid the Service of a man thoroughly disliked. Yet as march succeeded march and the hardships of that thirsty wilderness and cruel sun became more and more nearly unendurable he began to doubt the wisdom of his decision.

Then on the third day their water began to give out and there was a possibility of missing the wells, which Holroyd had said, in answer to a doubt Low had expressed on the first day out, they would reach in three days.

"Are you sure Issou knows this country thoroughly, and are you sure he is not trapping us all in the desert, perhaps to get those cases of whisky?"

"If you knew Issou you wouldn't ask that," said Holroyd. "In the first place, he is a strict Mohammedan and would die before he'd touch strong drink. Next, he loves me, though I *am* only a Five O'Clock Soldier."

"You shouldn't brood over that," Low sharply admonished; and the boy answered cheerfully, "I'm not brooding; I don't have to, for my man is going to eat those words and he is going to sign a little paper I have with me."

"Ah, I'm, as you say, beginning to understand. But the thing is, are you sure of this Issou? You see——"

Low broke off suddenly, staring at a figure that just then showed on the trail ahead. Then he cried out, "It *is* Issou. Whatever is he doing?"

The sergeant walked as if in distress, but as he approached they saw that he had his sandals bound to his feet heels-foremost, so that his tracks in the sand were reverse. Evidently he was covering up his trail. This was easy, for he moved along the tracks just made by Loader's party. Holroyd ran to him, gasping out a question.

"Is it done?"

"It is done. I pricked the water-skins. In a little while they camp, then make the discovery; then a little while and they cry for water; a little longer and they drink the whisky, then quickly the madness is on them and your enemy who scoffs at soldiers is at your mercy, O Little Excellency."

Issou's report shocked Low and determined him to interfere before the mischief consummated in real tragedy.

"This has gone far enough, Holroyd," he said reprovingly. "I promised to refrain from interference unless I saw urgent need. That need is now here. I must put a stop to this."

"Can you, Mr. Low?" the boy asked quietly—too quietly.

"What do you mean?" sharply.

"I mean that only Issou knows the wells, and he won't tell without my permission, and I will not give that permission until I have Loader's signature to my paper."

Low was really angry. He began to

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threaten until he saw how unmoved the boy was. Finally, he tried persuasion, offering to take the paper to Loader and get the signature. But the boy shook his head.

"He won't sign until death stares him in the face. No; it's the Five O'Clock Soldier's innings. Don't try to force me, Mr. Low, for I am determined my mother shall hold up her head in Little Framley. And," he added meaningly, "I have a gun." But he quickly excused himself by saying:

"If my family honor were not involved I would not do this. I have no quarrel with you, Mr. Low, but it is my say now. Let's sneak to the top of that sand-dune and spy from cover of those cacti." As the boy spoke he kept his hand on his revolver with a grim determination that again made Low wonder what injury he had suffered to turn his gentle spirit to such vicious determination.

LOW found himself a helpless spectator in the entanglements of the very plot he had been sent to investigate, forced by a nineteen-year-old youth into a position that had been utterly ridiculous had it been less promising of grim tragedy. With the sensations of an unwilling witness to a set execution he crept with Holroyd and Issou to the dune and lay among the cacti, looking down on Loader's camp less than a hundred yards off, with an eye to taking the youth off his guard and securing his revolver. But the chance never came. The boy never faltered, had his moves planned to every detail—even to the fountain-pen that was to rehabilitate the family honor. He watched the drama enacted in Loader's camp with the face of Nemesis.

The halt had just been called. The blacks no sooner put their parched lips to the water-skins than the awful fact was discovered. Owing probably to the circumstance that the skins had been three parts empty before Issou pricked them their gradual collapse had been unnoticed, the slow trickle down the negroes' backs being mistaken for perspiration.

The watchers saw the utter consternation of the blacks, then their rush to the white man. Quickly the drama centered on his rage. His instant thought was Issou, whose absence he had evidently not yet noticed. The discovery that Issou was gone now seemed to strike him with a foreknowledge of the diabolical plot, for he began at once searching the sands for the Houssa's tracks.

Low was tempted to call out, but on second thought refrained, remembering the boy's desperate vow not to show the wells until he had the signature. Best let the tragedy develop quickly to that climax, he thought. He pinched his arm to assure himself that he was awake, so like a staged drama was the scene below, with the white man's frantic search for Issou's track among the scuffed sand, then his despair, his futile rage and the horrible curses he flung into the wilderness at Issou.

Suddenly the figure collapsed into a huddled heap, face down between his knees, thinking, thinking, thinking—of the mythical bauble that so suddenly dissipated into nothingness, of the death staring him in the face. Once he raised his head and looked into the sky, as if already fearing the ghoulish buzzards, but quickly dropped his face again to his knees.

Low groaned to the boy, "For God's sake end it; let me take in that paper."

Holroyd answered calmly, "The time is not yet, and I *must* have his signature."

So the intense sun poured down its deadly rays on the stricken camp, evaporating every ounce of moisture from the wretches. Then it was that the negroes began broaching the whisky-packs, without interference from Loader, who so far refrained, knowing the deadliness of the liquor in that sun. As the drink went to their heads the negroes threw themselves into a frenzy of incantations to ju-ju, until they were exhausted and dropped like logs to the sands.

AGAIN Low urged intervention, for the sake of the innocent blacks. But Holroyd shook his head, speaking with dry throat.

"I'm sorry for the poor negroes, but they will recover quickly when it is over. The time is not yet; he will not sign my paper while he has strength to hope and eye to shoot. Wait until he has liquored and despaired."

"My God, Holroyd, look at him! What do you call despair?"

"What I carried with me these many months. I tell you he will pluck up heart and refuse to sign if he learns you are here; you must not go until he is in the throes and ready to sign his death-warrant for

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relief," he answered with indomitable persistence, his eyes focused on his victim.

Loader began fighting with the growing desire to imitate the blacks' attack on the whisky. Twice they saw him take up a bottle and put it down. Then suddenly he snatched it up a third time and drank heavily. The next moment he sprawled upon the sands.

This was the boy's cue. He sprang to his feet, calling in his thin, clear alto:

"Hullo, hullo! Ho, Loader, here is the Five O'Clock Soldier."

Loader raised his head, scrambled to his knees and feet, and stared at the avenging figure of the boy. He swept his arm across his eyes, evidently fearing hallucination. Again he stared, then began to stagger forward, gabbling words that were lost in his throat, until he was near enough to assure himself that it was a flesh-and-blood reality, when he drew his revolver and with shaking hands wildly emptied it at the dune.

Young Holroyd quietly took a paper from his breast-pocket and gave it with the fountain pen to Low, asking him to read it. Low read it, wonderingly, his lips forming the words:

I, George Loader, do hereby confess that I tricked Byron Holroyd into signing a sale-note for a picture of Colonel Byron Holroyd, and thereby did raise two thousand pounds and stole the same.

Scarcely had he finished ere the youth was pushing him toward Loader, saying:

"Make him sign, and put your name to it as witness, please, Mr. Low, and then Issou will take our negroes with the water-skins to the wells; and don't look at me like that—if you knew everything you would not blame me. He used me badly, as he now intended to use the Company by trading liquor to the natives against the law and trying to carry off mythical riches that would, if real, belong to the Company by right of his contract. Go on. Make him sign."

It was all so pat, the man was caught so red-handed, that Low had no scruples in getting the signature. This was an easy matter as it proved, for the wretch was too demoralized to offer opposition. Then Low attached his own name ere he returned the exculpating document to the youth, who placed it carefully in his shirt front.

"Go, Issou," he commanded. "It is all right. The paper makes everything all right. You have not to go far?"

"A little way to the right is a small oasis, little massa," answered the Houssa, as he took half a dozen negroes and departed.

THE boy turned impulsively to Low, gulping.

"You played the game square, Mr. Low, and I won't ever forget it. And I promised to tell you the story. I was what the Americans call an easy mark. That is, I had never met a thief and liar and was off-guard, and Loader was so very plausible—knew the world, while I knew only Little Framley.

"He talked of the Niger, of a pitchblende lake he had discovered, but could not claim because of that clause in his contract with the Company. But he said that any one with two thousand pounds could come out here and locate it with the help of his map and then go home and sell his discovery, which he said was very valuable because of the radium that would be extracted.

"Everybody was talking radium just then and I accepted his story without a suspicion. Besides, I had introduced him to my home, and I thought that that bound all men's honor. Then, too, I wanted money so bad—I wanted to go into the army, but mother and I could only just scrape along, and it takes money to be a regular officer.

"So when he schemed to borrow two thousand by leaving the picture for security I persuaded mother to let me send it to London, on the plea that it ought to be stored in a safety-vault. We arranged to meet in London, where I would write to mother what I had done, for I could not tell her that I meant to come to Africa, because—" he faltered, but plunged courageously on—"because I was all she had.

"In London I signed a sale-note, thinking I was merely signing a declaration of life-interest in the picture. Loader then got the money, but when I worried him to carry through the agreement he laughed at me—called me a Little Five O'Clock Soldier, and said that I'd better get out of the country quickly, or I'd be taken for grand larceny. You see he had me by the throat.

"All he would give me was a miserable two hundred pounds. I sent that to mother, with a brief explanation that I was going

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out in the service of a trading-company as it offered better scope than the bank, for that was the only thing I could think of.

"I went to the London offices of the company, and they took me right away. I anticipated that Loader would go the pace with that money, for I saw him riding in a hansom with a common woman and knew he would soon be returning broke to the Company's service.

"It came to me that I might get a chance to force a confession from him out here before the picture was put on sale, when it would all come out that I had signed a sale-note and my mother would not be able to hold up her head any more in Little Framley. You see, Mr. Low, I just had to get that confession, even if I died getting it. I'm going to register it right home the moment I get to Lokoja, and——oh, I feel g-o-o-d! I'm nineteen years of age and a Five-O'Clock Soldier, but I feel a *man* now."

Low came out of the study into which he had fallen while listening to the youth's pathetic story. He raised his head and gripped Holroyd's hand. As the tale was concluded, he saw with real relief Sergeant Issou, heading a procession of negroes with water-skins, come through the arums.

"Boy," he exclaimed, enthusiastically, "I admire you. Jove, but I don't know but what I wouldn't have done the same, if I had the wit and the courage. I've been in all kinds of investigations, but this—— Let's water these poor devils' parched throats, then strike for Jebba. What a story!"

TO STREETS CONDEMNED

BY O. H. ROESNER

MY SOUL cries out for the great wide spaces
Where a wild wind sweeps at the burst of dawn,
Where a cowboy lopes o'er the shimmering mesas,
And an Indian pony goes loitering on.

My heart cries out for the shadowing mountains,
The dashing brook and the murmuring pine;
For the ferny ways by the tinkling fountains
And the far, faint blush of horizon's line.

My soul may writhe for these lost companions
And long for The Silence to grip it again,
Yet my feet must hold to these granite cañons
Though my heart should shrivel with Longing's pain.

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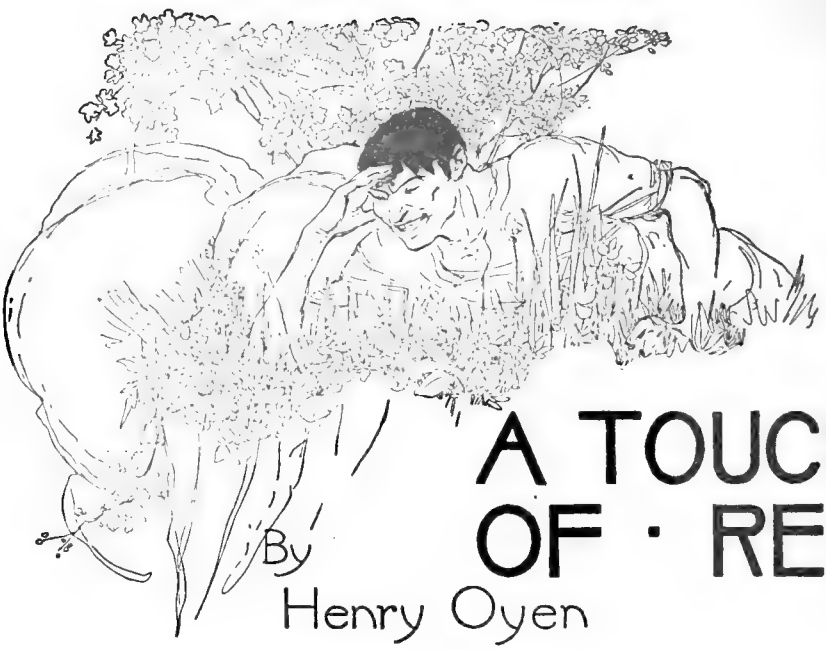

A TOUCH OF · RED

By Henry Oyen

THERE was a touch of Indian blood in Mary Filiatreau's blood. It wasn't much, probably about one-sixteenth, but it was enough to do the trick for Snaky Jack, bad-man. If she had been all white—but then Jack, who was a half-breed, never would have dared to do what he did.

IT BEGAN when Snaky Jack came out of the Big Swamp to the settlement of Little Ax to buy tobacco and found Torgeson, the big, light-hearted top-sawyer at the mill, paying attention to the girl with a trace of Chippewa in her ancestry. The fame of Snaky Jack had spread to Little Ax long before his coming, for Jack was bad—bad and proud of it. In those days it took something sterner than boy's play to win a reputation along the Wiscons', and Jack had a standing that made men drop their voices or cease speaking when he passed by.

There was the matter of that little discussion with the miners in the North Star refreshment-parlor at Hurley. Whispered rumor had it that on that occasion Jack had selected three men far gone in liquor to pick his quarrel with, but no one could say for sure, for after the smoke had cleared away the three miners were too dead to take any interest in further proceedings, and there was Snaky Jack on the ground, his Winchester never far from hand, ready to criticize in his own peculiar fashion any one reckless enough to start such stories going about him. There was also the matter of the Soo hold-up, when the express-messenger had taken a bullet through the hips and opened the safe to save his life, and when a careless young brakeman, seeing the desperado escape, had cried out, correctly or otherwise, no one ever knew: "Why, it's Snaky Jack," and received a .44 slug through his heart for his pains.

Caspar, of Vilas County, was a sheriff who took himself seriously and went into the Big Swamp after Snaky Jack. Nobody ever heard of Caspar after that. So the other sheriffs allowed their warants to grow dusty in pigeonholes, and the half-breed pursued his scheme of life as he saw fit. When events of his own creation made the towns a little too warm for him, he fled to the fastnesses of the Big Swamp, where no white man had any business going after a bad-man who was as much Indian as he was white. There he lay low until he judged the storm had blown over, then emerged to trouble some town or settlement

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that could have very well gotten along without his visits.

Finally he came to Little Ax when Carl Torgeson was courting Mary Filiatreau.

Perhaps it was the touch of red handed down by some Chippewa ancestor answering the call of its own, perhaps it was only the natural coquetry of an attractive young woman toward a dashing, devil-may-care man. At all events Mary Filiatreau looked at him more than once. There was no gainsaying that Jack had his attractions for women. He was tall and straight and thin. He walked with his head up and his shoulders swinging with the rhythm of some graceful wild animal, and French and Indian blood combined had given him a handsome, laughing face. Many women, both red and white, had looked upon him with favor, and not all of these were of the class to which Jack naturally belonged. From experience he judged his smile to be irresistible; and Mary Filiatreau laughed back at him when he smiled at her.

"You are such a bad, bad man," she said. "I am so afraid of you."

And she laughed so that her tall, lithe figure rippled.

"All right," said Jack. "You are for me."

Mary stopped laughing.

"You are the woman for me," continued Jack confidently. "You are the first woman who has looked me in the eyes and dared to laugh."

Now, there was too much white in Mary to appreciate this French-Indian bravado and she laughed again. This time Snaky Jack's sensitive ears detected the note of mockery, the superior white laughing at the inferior red, and the veins in his neck began to tighten.

"Do not laugh," he said slowly. "It is not well to laugh at me. Not in that way."

"What way?" asked Mary. She might have terminated the conversation then and there, but—while never for an instant was she unfaithful in thought or deed to the patient Torgeson—a little flirtation with this conceited desperado was not without interest.

"You laugh as if I was only an Indian and you were all white," replied the half-breed. "That is wrong. You are a woman, and I am a man. I am half white, and you are not without red blood. But that has nothing to do with it. I want you. You are going to be mine."

"Am I?" said the girl, and now she did not laugh. "Please be careful what you say, half-breed, or I will have a real man talk to you."

Snaky Jack's face split in a smile that showed two even rows of perfect, white teeth, but his eyes were like ice, and when a half-breed smiles that way it is time to be cautious.

"A man?" he repeated softly. "A real man? So. There is a man, then? You belong to a man? Yes; that Squarehead Torgeson, who runs the big saw. A stick of a man, as dead as a burnt hemlock. I know. But do you think that makes any difference to me? If you were his already it would make no difference. No! I would have you——"

"Go!" cried Mary. "I will not listen."

"You will!" snapped Snaky Jack. "Answer me this. Are you promised to this Torgeson?"

"I am," she said. "Now go, or you will be sorry."

Deep down in his swarthy throat the half-breed chuckled softly.

"And it is him—the Squarehead who laughs like a boy—that you will have talk to me? Ho ho! My girl, I see you do not know me. Do you know how I answer men who try to talk to me? And do you know that when I want a thing I get it? No? Well, I will let you know before long. That Torgeson! Ho ho! No, you are for Jack, you hear!"

The playful little devil, angel, or whatever spirit it is that makes some beautiful women play with fire, was back in Mary's heart by this time, and she laughed again.

"Good thing for you that Torgeson does not hear you talk so big," she said.

She looked him up and down from toe to head and stared at his straight, black hair.

"Torgeson is a real man," she said, turning away, "and all white."

SNAKY JACK took the stab with the stoicism proper to his red blood, but within, the French half of him was raging. He stood with the leer on his face and watched her go on to her father's house, his eyes feasting on the lithe swing of her body and his heart black with rage at the supercilious poise of her head. Long after she had disappeared within old Aleck

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Filiatreau's doorway he stood there, looking straight before him, the leer on his lips, his eyes seeing nothing that was visible to a white man, his expression betraying none of the dark, mystic emotions that were stirring in his heart.

After a while he thrust his hands in his pockets, shrugged his shoulders and wandered away. It was late in the afternoon, and he had a few errands to do before dark.

First of all he went to the post-office and there, using the office-pen, wrote a few words on a piece of paper which he secreted in his shirt-pocket. Next he went to the hardware store and purchased twenty feet of half-inch manila rope. Toward dark he wandered over to the railroad-track and after a search picked up a discarded coupling-pin. Then, carrying the rope and the pin, he hid himself in the brush beside a certain little path that led from the sawmill and waited, smiling unpleasantly, for the mill-whistle to blow at six o'clock.

The little path was the way that Carl Torgeson took from the mill to his boarding-place. When the whistle blew for quitting-time Torgeson ran the saw once through the log on the carriage, threw off the power, leaped down from his perch like a boy released from school, called a hearty good night and set out on the little path with eager steps.

He was particularly merry to-night, and he whistled a care-free tune, for in an hour or two he was going to see Mary. As he passed the little clump of brush, Snaky Jack rose up with the coupling-pin held ready. Some flash of instinct warned Torgeson of danger, and he whirled around just in time to take the blow full on the temple. The half-breed poised the pin for another blow, but it was not necessary. Torgeson lay in the dust of the path like an ox that has been felled by the butcher's hammer.

Snaky Jack worked rapidly and expertly. Beginning at the feet he wound the rope around and around the body of his victim. He finished off by tying the end in Torgeson's mouth as a gag, and when he was through the big man lay before him as helpless as a log. Snaky Jack dragged him into the brush and waited. Hour after hour he waited, until the lights in the houses went out one by one, and the settlement was asleep. Then he threw Torgeson over his shoulder and carried him and laid him down on the front door-step of Aleck Filiatreau. To his breast he pinned the paper on which he had written in the post-office, knocked violently on the door and fled with a laugh.

Mary Filiatreau came to the door with a light in her hand and nearly stumbled over her betrothed. She did not scream or cry out. She quietly set the lamp on the table, seized him by the shoulders and dragged him indoors. Torgeson was conscious now, though the only motion he could make was to roll his eyes. And now the little red streak in Mary cropped out. The blood was clotted on Torgeson's temple, and he was white and weak, but the girl's eyes were on the paper. Before she touched his wound she bent over and read what was written thereon.

And then she smiled—just a trifle.

Torgeson saw it. The girl looked from the paper to his eyes, and quickly smothered the smile. But he had seen. He gasped for breath, and she bent swiftly over. Her strong fingers tore the rope out of his mouth. She called his name and kissed him. But he had seen the smile, and tossed his head away in anger.

"What is it?" he demanded hoarsely. "What made you smile?"

She hung her head.

"Answer me," commanded the helpless man. "What made you smile?"

Without a word she unfastened the paper and held it before his eyes so he might read what Snaky Jack had written:

Here is yore mann.

Torgeson lay silent and still as she flew for a knife to cut the ropes. As she bent over to slash him free he said, as if suddenly stricken with an idea:

"No, don't use the knife. Find the knots and untie them. Don't cut the rope."

"But, dear Carl, you're suffering. Let me——"

"Don't cut the rope," he repeated. "Untie the knots."

When he was free she brought water, bathed and tied up his head and soon had him in a chair. Torgeson's circulation came back slowly, and he sat helplessly fingering the note that had been pinned to his breast. His eyes followed her as she moved about absorbed in his care. No need for him to doubt her. He knew that as he saw the solicitude and anxiety with which she hovered over him, but—she had smiled, as he

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lay there trussed like a calf, smiled in a way that reminded Torgeson that she was not all white.

"Roll up the rope, Mary," he said, presently. "I want to use it."

"What for?" she asked.

"Roll up the rope," he repeated. "That's right. Tie it well. Now give me my hat. I must go."

"You can't," she said, holding him down. "You are too weak."

"Weak?" he repeated. And now it was Torgeson who smiled.

"Weak, you think, Mary. Well, we shall see."

"But, dear——"

"No," he said, putting her arms away. "Wait, and let us see what we shall see. Good-night."

It was twelve miles from Little Ax to Berrill Junction, the county-seat, and Torgeson walked it in the dark night with a free, swinging gait that showed that the clout on the head had not hurt him. The sheriff was surprised when he came pounding on the door in the small hours of morning.

"You've got a warrant for Snaky Jack, haven't you?" said the sawyer tersely.

"Why, sure," said the sheriff. "What's that got to do with you?"

"Swear me in as a deputy," said Torgeson. "Give me that warrant to serve."

Before daylight he was back in his boarding-place in Little Ax, a duly appointed deputy sheriff with a warrant for Snaky Jack's arrest in his pocket. He ate hurriedly and heavily for breakfast, took down his Winchester from over the bed, filled his pockets with cartridges and matches, coiled the rope around his waist and, without a word to anybody, set out in the still gray dawn for the heart of the Big Swamp, Snaky Jack's hiding-place.

II

THE Big Swamp is about thirty miles long and thirty wide, and so far as is known no white man save Torgeson ever came to know it at first hand. A few Chippewas claimed to be able to guide one through, but, as no one ever had any inclination to accept their offers, they never had been put to the test. It was accepted as true that Snaky Jack alone knew the Big Swamp, and that any other man venturing to wander therein was as good as lost and dead.

Torgeson hated swamps. He was a good woodsman, but he had confined his hunting to hard, high ground, and he knew nothing of the Big Swamp. This did not trouble him. He knew that Snaky Jack was somewhere out there in the treacherous bogs, and the person of Snaky Jack was a thing that he had resolved to get. The way to get it, of course, was to go out into the swamp after it. So he plunged into the close-packed tamaracks and began to hunt for the trail of his man like a hound searching for the scent of a deer that has been raised. Only Torgeson was more patient.

Now Snaky Jack had not fled to the Big Swamp after dropping Torgeson at Mary Filiatreau's door. The joke had been too good for him to miss, and in the morning he lay up on the river-bluff that overlooked the settlement and watched for signs of his handiwork's effects. Thus it happened that he saw Torgeson steal out toward the swamp in the gray hours of the dawn. The half-breed knew well that it was too early for deer-hunting, and Torgeson never went out after anything else. He saw his enemy circling in the marsh-grass along the swamp-edge searching for the sign of a trail and, though he was too far away to see the rope, the story was as clear to him as if it had been spoken. He rolled over on his back and laughed at the sky.

"Ho ho! That Squarehead! He—he is going after me! Going into the Big Swamp after me!"

Then he lay still and thought it over. A couple of hours after Torgeson had disappeared in the tamaracks Snaky Jack slipped down from the bluff, pulled his rifle from the hollow log where he had hidden it and, with a smile on his lips, set out on the other's trail into the Big Swamp.

Torgeson was disappointed when he found no trail leading from Little Ax into the swamp. He had hoped to get on the half-breed's tracks and follow him, no matter where, when or how he went, until they came face to face. The absence of tracks, however, only slightly altered his plans, for he knew that somewhere in the swamp Jack had a secure hiding-place, and sooner or later he would flee there for refuge. Having decided on his new plan, Torgeson set out and broke a way through the brush at a pace that few men would have cared to

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equal. And one thing drove him on: the memory of the little smile on Mary Filiatreau's lips.

Snaky Jack was a good woodsman, and the swamp was his home, so before noon he knew by the signs on the trail he was following that he was traveling more slowly than the man ahead. It was no part of Jack's program to let Torgeson gain any great lead, so he pulled in his belt a notch and went on at a swifter pace.

By nightfall he was a little disgusted. The man ahead was outwalking him and steadily increasing his lead. Well, there was one way to overcome that. Torgeson, being a white man, would bed down as soon as darkness fell in the tamaracks. Jack knew that he had only to keep going well into the night to have his quarry completely at his mercy.

He made no stop for the coming of night. He followed the trail instinctively, as a wolf in the night follows the track of a deer, and he smiled a little at the thought of catching Torgeson asleep. At daybreak he was still following, and the first rays of the sun, revealing the dented moss under Torgeson's footprints, told him that he had not gained a mile.

Snaky Jack was very angry, very hungry, and a little sleepy. After all, there was no hurry. He had his man there in the Big Swamp, which only he knew, and it was only a question of time before the other would be hopelessly lost. Then the half-breed knew that he would hold the whip-hand. Some spruce-hens foolishly ruffled their feathers on a tamarack near by and drew his attention. He knocked the heads off two of them with two shots, built a small fire and proceeded to make breakfast.

At about the same time Torgeson was breakfasting off a rabbit that had loped into an open spot within easy range. He built a big, hot fire and cooked hurriedly. Hurriedly he ate, then he was on his way again. For each time that he felt inclined to pause and rest the smile on Mary's face appeared before him, and he knew no peace. He was that rare thing in the big woods, a total abstainer, and Snaky Jack had dabbled much with the rot-gut whisky of river-towns.

By nightfall that day a crease had come between Jack's eyes, and around his mouth were the lines of fatigue and worry. Torgeson was leading him farther than ever. Jack walked until the darkness made further traveling difficult, then with a curse he cooked the game he had shot as he walked, threw himself down and went soundly to sleep. Torgeson slept for two hours that night, and then the face of a girl, with a smile on her lips, came into his dreams and he was up and doggedly on the trail again. An hour after sunrise he struck an old, deep-worn trail in the swamp-moss, and threw himself down to examine the tracks. When he arose he gave vent to a roar of delight that sent near-by rabbits hopping in fright. The tracks were made by river-men's shoes, the kind Snaky Jack always wore, and Torgeson laughed as he followed the path deeper into the swamp.

Snaky Jack was far behind by this time, and he was getting worried. He had started out with no cartridges except the seven in his rifle, and five of them had been used in procuring food. It was not a good thing to be on the trail of a man who traveled like a driven deer with only two cartridges to one's name.

Also, it was foolish when there was a good supply of ammunition cached within a two-hours' walk. So Jack, with a final curse at Torgeson's trail, turned away and dove into the tamaracks for a short cut to the brush shanty where he was wont to hide.

III

FAR back in the brush a tired, patient man lay flat on his stomach and watched the little clearing around the shanty. He had found what he was looking for, and he knew that now he needed only to wait. One day, two days, three days, a week, two weeks, a month, if necessary, he would wait there hidden in the brush. He came of a patient breed. There was game in abundance in the swamp, and he craved only food enough to keep him alive and in strength until the man who had built the shanty should appear. And so, munching the leg of a rabbit that he had cooked the day before, he lay there with his chin in the moss, while Snaky Jack came swinging boldly into the clearing.

Jack was hungry and made no effort at concealment. He entered the shanty, came out with a supply of cartridges and boldly went hunting. The man in the brush stopped eating and slid his rifle forward. In a few minutes there was a shot, and soon Jack returned to the clearing carrying a

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rabbit. Standing his rifle against a log he hurriedly built a fire and began to clean his game.

The man in the brush began to move forward. He wormed himself along on his belly, never raising his head from the ground, his cocked rifle always held before him covering the man by the fire. When he reached the edge of the clearing he took a long and careful aim at Jack's rifle and sent a steel-jacketed bullet into the lock. Then, as the startled half-breed leaped to his feet, he scattered the fire with a second shot.

"Hello, Jack!" he called, throwing a third bullet past the bad-man's ear. "Sit right down and cook the rabbit. I'm hungry, too!"

Torgeson came slowly out of the brush with his sights squarely on the half-breed's breast, and Jack, after a glance at his broken rifle, shrugged his shoulders and sat down. He saw the coil of rope around Torgeson's waist and he felt a little cold.

"Cook the rabbit," said Torgeson, seating himself on the log. "I'm hungry."

"Go to ——!" growled Jack. "Shoot and have it over with."

Torgeson laughed.

"Shoot? Well, I should say not," he said. "You're no good to me dead. I need you alive."

"Nobody can take me alive," flashed the half-breed, and like the leap of a cat he was on Torgeson with his hands on the rifle.

"Good!" roared the Norwegian as they came breast to breast. "Good!"

He wrenched the barrel from Jack's grip, whirled the rifle above his head and threw it far into the brush.

"Good!" he cried, and rushed on his man. He caught his arms and pinioned them to his side. He raised him up and threw him to the ground. He flung himself upon him and his great, hairy fists rose and fell and rose and fell until the outlaw lay senseless on the ground. Then he uncoiled the rope. When Snaky Jack came to he was lying with his arms and legs tied, while back of him trailed a long leading-rope.

Torgeson was calmly broiling the rabbit.

"They're fat this year," he said, as it sizzled. "When we've eaten we'll start back."

"Go to ——" sneered Jack. "You think you will take me back? Not alive."

TORGESON continued to broil the rabbit. When it was done he sat down and ate comfortably.

"How much do you weigh, Jack?" he asked between mouthfuls. " 'Bout a hundred and sixty-five, I'd make you. 'Bout the same as a small buck. Oh, I guess I can drag you out. It will take longer, but there's no hurry. Fine rabbit you got. Sorry you ain't going to eat until I get you out of the swamp."

Jack turned his face to the ground.

"You go to ——," he repeated.

After he had nibbled the rabbit to the last bone, Torgeson entered the shanty and found an ax. He selected a bushy fir-sapling, cut it down and dragged it over to where Jack lay.

"You know how we drag a deer out, Jack," he said. "Well, that's how you're going to ride out of the swamp."

He picked him up and laid him, despite his attempts to struggle, in the middle of the tree. With a couple of turns of the rope he fastened him on securely and, with his rifle in hand, threw the free end of the rope over his shoulder.

"Come on, Jack," he said, and without another word started to drag his man down the long trail.

On the wet marsh grass the boughs of the balsam slid like the runners of a sleigh, and Torgeson went on at a good pace. For an hour Snaky Jack lived up to his reputation and endured his plight with never a whimper. Then he broke out, and at every step he cursed Torgeson with all the curse-words in his vocabulary. At last he mentioned the name of Mary Filiatreau, and Torgeson halted and came back to him, loosening his belt as he came.

"You must stop that tune, Jack," he said, and prying the tight-set jaws apart he jammed the belt in and strapped the head tightly to the sapling.

"Now we'll make better time," he said, picking up the rope, and went on as before.

When darkness approached he stopped, shot a rabbit and made a meal.

He was up at daybreak much refreshed, but a glance at his prisoner's face made him pause. The face of the half-breed was sunken away to the bones and his eyes were as the eyes of a man about to die. Torgeson unloosened the belt.

"Jack, will you get up and walk if I feed you?" he asked.

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The swollen tongue of the bad-man struggled long before it could speak, but then it whispered only, "Go to ——!"

"Then back goes the strap," said Torgeson.

"Water," whispered Jack. "Just a little water."

Torgeson jammed the belt home.

"Wait!" gurgled Jack in terror.

Torgeson paused. For a while the half-breed studied his man, then his eyes turned away.

"I'll walk," he said faintly. "Water! A little water for the love of Heaven!"

IV

IT WAS long after dark on the third day that Torgeson knocked on the door of Mary Filiatreau and Mary came out with a light, as she had done before. Torgeson led a meek and humbled desperado into the room and closed the door.

"This is the bad-man who carried me to your door the other night," said he. "He has come to say he is very sorry. Take a good look at him."

And Mary looked at the broken-spirited bad-man before her, and thought of his bravado of the few days before, and at the big, patient man who had brought him in. Then a delighted smile came upon her lips. She laughed outright and threw herself into Torgeson's arms. And Torgeson smiled, and knew that after this it would always be well with them.

The sheriff down at Berrill Junction was vexed to hear a loud knocking at his door in the small hours of next morning. He bustled out and stumbled over the roped, helpless figure of Snaky Jack. There was a paper pinned to his breast, and the sheriff picked it up. The paper was much crumpled. It read:

Here is yore mann.

But Torgeson was already hurrying back to Little Ax, where Mary Filiatreau was waiting.

EUROPE'S LAST VACANT THRONE

Albania—The Land of Blood, Mystery and Unrest

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

BY THE time you read these words it may well be that this shadowy throne, for which men have struggled unsuccessfully since history began, will be vacant no longer. Indeed, according to some reports it has already been filled. A strange company of men have come forward and offered to take up the burden that no man has ever proved strong enough to bear, and perhaps one among them will achieve the goal—for a little time, at any rate. Princes, commoners, adventurers, successful generals, they are all making their bids to-day, pushing the chessmen they command back and forth across the checkered board of diplomacy and statecraft, doing their best to maneuver such claims as each may have

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into that position where they will prove most weighty.

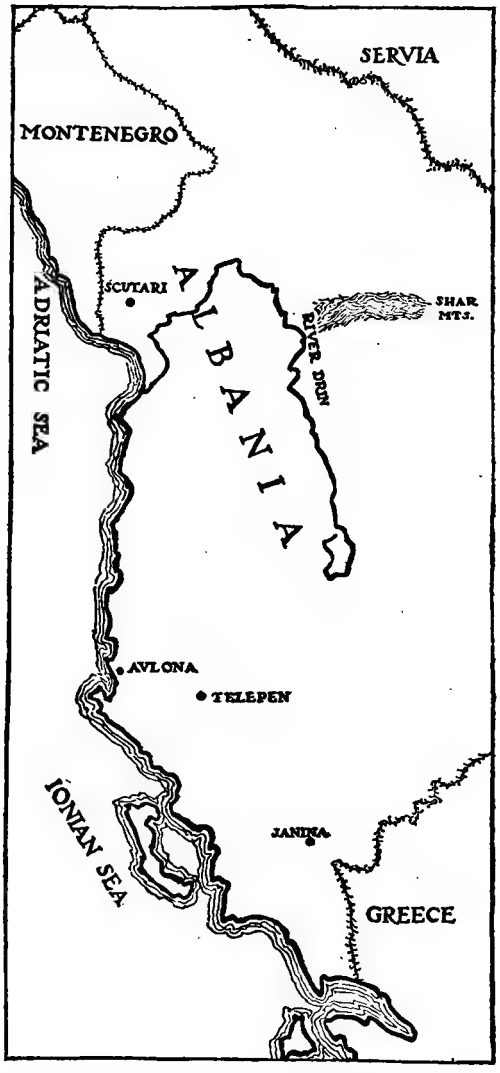
But after all, the factor that strikes one as most important in summing up the tangled situation is the hereditary distaste of the nation in question for kings and thrones. Albania is sixty miles from Italy—as Gibbon said more than one hundred years ago, it is "a country within sight of Italy which is less known than the interior of America." To-day it is as wild as Afghanistan, a country to which it may be most aptly compared because of the similarity of the status of civilization.

Like Afghanistan, Albania is organized on the tribal system, with all the inherent evils that system produces. Like Afghanistan, also, in Albania the law of the rifle is the ultimate law. The blood-feud, or *jak*, is the principal occupation of the males of arms-bearing age, while there is no central authority of sufficient power to regulate the conduct of the several tribes and the great feudal families.

Whatever differences there are arise from the fact that the Afghans are Asiatics, while the Albanians are Europeans. In fact, they represent perhaps the purest European or Aryan stock in the world. They are unquestionably the oldest example of the Aryans in the southeast of Europe. Their antiquity is so great that history and tradition are at a loss to fix the date of their arrival in the country they now inhabit, while their virility is so marked that although time after time in the last 2,000 years waves of invasion have rolled over Albania, the native Albanians in every case have succeeded in swallowing up the invaders and gradually blotting out their national characteristics. More than this, they have actually succeeded in stamping the imprint of their own physical characteristics upon the people of surrounding countries as far north as the Danube and to the southernmost confines of Greece.

EUROPE'S UNKNOWN BACK-YARD

TAKE a map of Europe, and pick out the Italian Peninsula, with the Adriatic Sea separating it from the Balkan Peninsula. Across from Italy you will notice a long strip of roughly plotted country, following the line of the sea-coast, from Montenegro to Greece, plentifully dotted with mountains, with two or three ports indicated, and evincing a remarkable rarity of place-names. Large stretches of territory in the interior are totally unmapped. In other places, if you know anything about map-making and the general geological lay of the land, you can tell that the map-maker was drawing on his imagination to help in



The Land That Never Had a Throne

filling in the boundaries. This is Albania, a land which even its own people do not wholly know in this twentieth century, when the very poles have ceased to be mysteries.

You can see at a glance, if you know anything about international affairs and strategy

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in general, the dominating position of this strip of country. Considering its area, it has a remarkable amount of sea-coast, frequently indented with good bays and harbors. It practically commands the Adriatic. In fact, the man who commands the fortress of Avlona can all but say what shall and what shall not be in the Adriatic. The Venetians realized this in the days of their maritime greatness, and they rimmed the coast of Albania with a series of fortified towns, that were as much havens for their galleys of war as gathering-places of commerce. For commerce has never been one of Albania's strong points.

And yet, mark you, the land is a rich land, remarkably rich. Ridged and criss-crossed with mountains, that rise up from its surface like the spines from a porcupine's back, it is yet possessed of abundant rolling plains, plentifully watered, and, in the southern districts, especially—where the tribal system gives place to a scheme of government entirely medieval, such as was known in fifteenth-century England—fine results are gained from agriculture. In the north the hills are covered with splendid forests, practically virgin, except in the neighborhood of Scutari, where those left untouched by Turkish greed were sacrificed to war.

Minerals abound. In ancient times gold was mined in the Drin Valley. Later the Venetians found silver in plenty in the country of the Mirdite tribe. There are iron and coal, silver-lead, copper, antimony. In fact, there is everything to make a country prosperous; everything, that is, except a stable government, adequate means of communication and schools.

Every Christian power in southeastern Europe has had its eye upon this country. The Turks never appreciated Albania. For political purposes, they preferred to have as wild and impassable a barrier as possible between themselves and western Europe, so they encouraged the Albanians to remain uncivilized. Aside from that, though, the Albanians of all religions hated them and refused to admit the Sultan's authority. Italy would like to own Albania. So would Austria. Greece had cravings she will have to satisfy in Epirus.

The entire history of Mediterranean and Balkan politics alike is crammed with plots and counter-plots for the possession of Albania. Sometimes men have succeeded in setting up short-lived kingdoms and principalities within its boundaries; but the remarkable feature about it is that sooner or later the Albanians have always pried every occupant off his throne.

Two men only have managed to win the respect and submission of native Albanians. They won their way by sheer force of character and brute might, and when they died their kingdoms crumbled with them. These men were George Castriot, or Skanderbeg, the Albanian janizary who revolted from his master, the Sultan of Turkey, in the fifteenth century and freed his countrymen from whatever semblance of power the Turks held over them; and Ali Pasha of Janina, the famous tyrant of the early part of the last century, who maintained his precarious seat until he was an old man and then died a violent death such as he had decreed to many others.

It is worthy of note that these two men are the only ones who have ever met with any pronounced measure of success in establishing universal rule over Albania. None of the Sultans has succeeded in doing so in reality. The Albanians may spend most of their time in harassing each other, but whenever a foreign invader enters their country they band together, and in recent times have met with slight difficulty in expelling him or assimilating him.

In ancient times they seem to have used the assimilating process more frequently. All over the country, except in the inaccessible wilds of the Mirdites, you will find Slavonic names, mute testimony of eruptions of Slavs, yet you will seldom find pronounced traces of Slavonic blood in the population. Almost everywhere, the physical type is the giant Albanian—rather blond, with wide head and fair hair.

The spontaneity with which mutual differences are cast aside in times of invasion is one of their most peculiar characteristics. Although the inter-tribal warfare is constant, there is seldom any religious hatred involved, notwithstanding the fact that three different religions are firmly established in the country. About three-fifths of the inhabitants are Moslems—if you can call men Moslems who live by those provisions of the Koran that suit them and swear by the Virgin. The rest are nearly equally divided between Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics, with the balance somewhat in favor of the latter. Most of the tribes contain both Christians and

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Moslems. It is strange that in this most savage part of the Sultan's dominions the doctrine of religious liberty has always held more or less sway.

Geographically speaking, the people of Albania are divided into two very dissimilar groups. Those in the north—mostly hillmen, and shepherds by occupation—are called Ghegs, while the southerners, many of them farmers, are called Tosks. The River Shkumb divides the two groups. Albanians never speak of themselves by that name, by the way. They are *Shkupetar*—"Rock-Dwellers"; and their country is Shkupenia. The Ghegs are the fiercest men of the race. It is with them that the interesting tribal organization is carried to its most pronounced extreme.

In all parts of Albania, however, both Low and High, the law that prevails is the unwritten law, *Kunun-i Leka Dukajinit*, which was composed by one Leka Dukajini in the fourteenth century, and has been handed down by word of mouth by the elders or voivodes of the clans.

The tribal organization is also practically the same in all districts. First there is the tribe itself, the *Mal*—or mountain, to translate literally. This is divided into several clans, known as *baryaks* or standards—much like the Manchu "banners"— each under a *baryaktar* or standard-bearer. And in turn each clan is divided into communities known as *mahale* and presided over by *jobars*, men who combine in themselves the duties of mayors and judges. Each tribe is a political whole in itself, self-governing, practically independent, and maintaining its own diplomatic agent or *buluk-bashi* at Scutari, through whom all intercourse with the Turkish government is carried on, as with a foreign sovereign power. By means of this scheme of interdependent bodies, each politically entire, and safeguarded by the natural roughness of their country as well as by the native ability of the population to use arms, the Albanian tribesmen have been able to maintain their individuality and freedom up to the present against all odds.

ALBANIA, THE LAND OF HARD KNOCKS

SO LONG ago as the fourth century A. D. the oncoming wave of the Goths sent one of its ripples swashing into the foothills of the Shar range which traverses Albania. But the Albanians seem to have resisted this wave, as they did a similar and more powerful one in the following century. In 640 they were partially subdued by a great Serbo-Croatian invasion, the unbeaten remnants of the tribes retiring to that portion of the Mirdite country which to this day bears no traces of Slavonic nomenclature.

After the Servians came the Bulgarians and the Byzantine emperors. For a time each triumphed, only to fall back before the insuperable task of overriding that singularly virile strain, which seemed capable of accepting all invaders and swallowing them up, so that in a generation or two the identity of any foreign colonists was lost. In 1081 the all-conquering Normans, under the famous Robert Guiscard and his son, the picturesque Bohemund, tried to set up in Albania another Norman kingdom like that of Sicily. But after certain ephemeral successes they too failed.

In 1204 Michael Comnenus, of the Imperial Byzantine line, driven from Constantinople by the Latins of the Fourth Crusade, erected an independent kingdom in southern Albania, which was called the Despotate of Epirus. In the meantime the Sicilian kings of the House of Anjou were establishing what they called the Kingdom of Albania in the central part of the Albanian territory. Those were stirring days, when simple knights won dukedoms, and barons carved out kingdoms for themselves from the rich spoil of southeastern Europe, heedless of the impending Moslem hosts that were already preparing for the last attack that should entrench them in Europe.

The Servians, once more waxing strong with the advent of a strong ruler, again forged to the front in Albanian affairs and asserted their authority in the north. But after the death of Stephen Dushan their unwieldy empire fell apart, and the native chieftains of Albania, with that fierce aggressive individualism which is still the keynote of the race, seized the reins of authority and won back their tribal independence.

Shortly afterward the Sicilian dominion, together with the uncertain sway of the Despot of Epirus, vanished like dust before the onrushing sweep of the Turkish armies, and Albania entered upon another phase of conflict.

In 1431 the Turks captured Janina and

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began their definite advance into the country. The native chiefs who had seized the power after the collapse of Dushan's empire and the other ephemeral dynasties fell back before such mighty hosts. But help came from an unexpected quarter, and for a few years the Albanians made headway against the mighty Asiatic tide in a defense that has lived in history by reason of the extraordinary fascination of the central figure that was its inspiration.

Skanderbeg—or Alexander Bey, to use the uncorrupted form of his name—was an Albanian who, like many other Christians, had been captured in his youth and placed in the corps of jànizaries, or household troops of the Sultan, and there trained in arms. In the course of years he attained to high command. But when he was about forty years of age, becoming incensed at his royal master over some unknown matter, Skanderbeg determined to leave him, and returned to Albania, where the ex-janizary soon possessed himself of several strong fortresses and won the confidence of the people. For the next twenty-two years Skanderbeg battled strenuously against army after army sent by the Turks against him—two commanded by the Sultan in person—and always succeeded in hurling them back.

But Europe would not heed his calls for aid, and when he died the last hope of Albania perished. Whatever disconnected resistance was offered afterward the Turks made short work of, and notwithstanding the fact that the Venetians because of their naval power were able to retain hold of their ports until the early years of the sixteenth century, Albania became a portion of the far-spreading Turkish Empire.

But despite the nominal suzerainty of the Sultans, their rule was never definitely established and the great majority of the tribes have never paid a cent of tribute. Moreover, when the Moslem power passed its zenith and began to decline at the end of the seventeenth century, the Albanians, naturally astute politicians and quick to see an opportunity, took advantage of the situation to shake off whatever shreds of control the Turks still pretended to. Their freedom from all regulation was not seriously threatened after that until the Young Turks came into power several years ago, and it is an open question how much good the Young Turks did themselves by the savage war they waged against the clansmen.

THE END OF THE INDEPENDENT PASHALIKS

IT WILL have been noted in this sketch that at regular intervals, apparently, some man or men would come forward and attempt to carve a kingly crown out of Albanian territory. Every race that ever came within hail of the Albanian coasts has fallen victim to this strange craving, and the Turks were not immune to it.

About 1760, one Mohammed of Bushat, a native Moslem chieftain, obtained from the Sultan the post of Pasha of Scutari—a very important office, because of the constant warfare that was waged against Montenegro. Before long Mohammed announced an independent sovereignty. Unlike most of his predecessors, he was able to preserve it and hand it down to his son, who, in turn, passed it on to several generations of his descendants. But it must be remembered that the Pashas of Scutari, as they were called, did not pretend to royal rank, nor did they ever govern a very considerable extent of territory.

Some years after the Pasha of Scutari cut loose from Turkish leading-strings, a similar principality was founded in the south by Ali Pasha of Tepelen, who is known to history as Ali Pasha of Janina. Ali is generally regarded as a perfect type of the Oriental despot and human monster. By clever, unscrupulous intrigue, Ali Pasha possessed himself of Janina and the country round about it, including most of Epirus and a large slice of Albania proper. Here he entrenched himself for years, becoming so powerful that in his prime he negotiated treaties with Napoleon and the King of England, playing off the two protagonists of their period against each other for his own advantage. But, in the grayness of his age, the Sultan finally moved to crush him. Ali's head decorated a post in the Great Square of the Serai at Constantinople.

At about the same time the hereditary Pashalik of Scutari was abolished and the ruling dynasty wiped out by practically identical methods, and once again Albania was nominally ruled by the Sultan's vicegerents. But it is especially interesting to observe that the great bulk of the true Albanian population paid no more attention

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to the Sultan than they had paid to Ali Pasha of Janina or Mohammed Pasha of Scutari. Behind the bulwark of their mountains they were safe from all human authority, and they knew it.

The Prenk Doda Pasha, hereditary ruler of the Mirdites, for instance, then as now scorned all outside interference, and whenever the Turks did venture to attempt to impose their authority upon the Mirdites the tribesmen, led by their prince—of the *dere e Jorn Markut*, or House of John Marco, and a lineal descendant of the great Skanderbeg—and their spiritual superior, the Mitred Abbot of St. Alexander, would fortify their passes, roll down stones on the Turks and pick them off by long-range fire until the enemy tired of a thankless undertaking. The Mirdites, who are Roman Catholics to a man, constitute the only tribe in Albania all the members of which belong to one religion.

The next attempt at formation of a national spirit in Albania was in 1878, when the Albanian League was formed. This, strangely enough, was based on the idea of a confederacy, rather than on that of a kingdom. This fact is worthy of comment because it is the first time that the idea of a democratic form of central government seems to have been broached.

The Albanian League was formed by the various native chiefs of all tribes and religions, originally of their own volition, it is said, although later on the Turkish government lent them some support. The idea of the organization was to demonstrate to the great powers the national feeling of Albania, and bring influence to bear upon the Berlin Congress not to alienate any Albanian territory.

Later, however, after the initial purpose of the League had been achieved, the movement became enthusiastically nationalistic, and the Turks attempted to crush it by force of arms. But their fear was really needless, as the organization soon fell apart by reason of the jealousies of the different tribes and leaders. Again the Albanians had demonstrated their remarkable inability to sink mutual differences for national advantages. The Mirdites were afraid the Dukajin would have more influence than they in the League. The great feudal families—the Vliores of Avlona, who are said to own 150 square miles of country, and the Toptans of Tirana, for instance, who could put thousands of riflemen into the field—were equally jealous of their own privileges, and feared the prospect of the domination of the ruthless mountain-tribes. Besides, to tell the truth, these great feudal families—almost all of which are Moslem—stand closer to the Turkish government than the rest of their countrymen, and as a rule have never favored any plan that contemplated severing connections with Constantinople.

THE WOULD-BE KINGS WHO WEREN'T

THE failure of the Albanian League brings us down to recent times, and the efforts of modern adventurers to pluck fortune in the shape of a royal crown out of the iron peaks of the Shar range. They are a curious company, those adventurers. Probably no man knows their entire number or the names of all who have attempted to realize the ambition. Many a royal princeling or scion of the numerous mediatized and deposed royal houses that exist in Europe to-day has plotted his expedition to Albania and the seizure of its shadowy throne, so often struggled for, so seldom gained.

Undeterred by the fate that had befallen their predecessors, these men launched their boldly conceived projects, arranged the details, enlisted their adherents, sent their representatives to interested powers to effect "understandings"—which generally meant loans. More of these expeditions have been actually launched and attempted than the public knows of. A great many in the past thirty years have gone up in smoke before any real start was made, but at least several have attempted the physical seizure of Albania. I was once asked to take part in one of these expeditions, the leader of which was never mentioned, but who was understood to be a member of a well-known house of royal pretenders.

Of all the various Albanian pretenders, though, perhaps none was better known than the so-called "Prince" Albert Ghika, a really remarkable man, who for years built up a popular impression that he was not only a claimant to the crown of the mountain country, but also in some unknown, yet vaguely appreciated way, was a descendant of its former kings. "Hereditary pretender to the thrones of Albania and Jagerschmidt,"

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he inscribed on his cards. Where Jagerschmidt may be, I don't know.

He is not, as some persons have supposed, a member of the great Rumanian family of Ghika, the members of which have played an important part in the history of the twin principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. The Ghikas of Rumania have formally disowned their namesake, while the Rumanian foreign office has notified most of the European governments at various times that it would not be responsible for any of his statements. So far as can be learned from such sources as the Rumanian government has canvassed, "Prince" Albert is a son of a poor merchant of Jassy, a Rumanian town.

However that may be, there is no blinking the fact that the man has impressed all sorts of people. Traveling around with a retinue of servants, equerries and private secretaries, hiring whole suites of rooms in hotels at fashionable watering-places, he has attracted to himself no small amount of attention, and possibly more.

Ghika really has been into Albania more than once and has worked up something of a following for himself. It is said that when the Duc de Montpensier made his unsuccessful dash for the throne last Spring he took Ghika along with him, with the understanding that the man who was chosen by the Albanians should receive the help of his unsuccessful companion. This story sounds somewhat fishy, though, and was probably started by the fact that both Montpensier and Ghika made their final bids for the last vacant throne that Europe has to offer at about the same time.

The Duc de Montpensier, who is not yet thirty years of age, is a brother of the Duc d'Orleans, the chief Royalist Pretender to the throne of France. Incidentally, he is not the Royal Pretender whose expedition I myself was asked to join. He is hardly the sort of man who would be impressed by Ghika's claim. That story is incredible.

Montpensier tried for the throne as a purely sporting proposition. He is a first-rate sportsman, fond of adventure; and having nothing better to do last spring, he commissioned his steam-yacht, got together a select crowd of cronies, numbering some of the best-known titles in Western Europe, bought a quantity of rifles and some machine-guns, and set sail for the Albanian coast, with the modest proclamation that he intended to be king of that country.

Now, the full story of the reception of that expedition has never been published, and probably never will be. Montpensier did get to Albania, though; he did land, and with a few companions he even penetrated into the interior, where he met Ismail Kemel Bey—about whom we shall hear more later on in this story—one of the two most powerful men in all Albania, and the head of the provisional government that was set up in that country after it became apparent to the Albanians that one result of the Balkan War would be the necessity of their shifting for themselves.

Just what Ismail Kemel told Montpensier, or what sort of a reception the Frenchman met, can't be said; but at any rate, after first issuing his proclamation of royalty, Montpensier suddenly decided to decamp, made his way back to the coast, scurried aboard his yacht, heaved his anchor and departed to his large ancestral estates. It may be that the *Malissori*, or Highlanders, as the mountain-tribes are called, sent him a warning of exactly what his fate would be if he tarried. In the circumstances, one who knows anything at all about Albanian ways can't blame the Duc for taking the course he did.

About the same time Ghika, it seems, ventured into Albania, dodged around a bit, concluded that his chances for the crown didn't measure up to the chances he was taking with his neck, and likewise decamped. It will be interesting to see what he does next if some other man actually attains the throne to which he has been a pretender so long. Adequate jobs for royal pretenders who have lost their occupations are not found on every bush, though the Austrian Foreign Office always has much work to be done in the neighborhood of other people's laundry-tubs.

ESSAD'S LONE-HAND PLAY

HAVING disposed of the two most recent European pretenders who have tried for Albania's throne and lost it, we may turn to the most important rival whom any other European claimant to the throne must be prepared to face. He is Essad Pasha, the Turkish general who was second in command of the garrison of Scutari, and according to one story succeeded to the command after the assassination of his

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superior. The point of chief importance is that when Scutari surrendered, Essad Pasha was in command of the garrison. As became known soon after the event, the surrender of Scutari was a clever *coup* engineered by Essad Pasha and his besieger, King Nicholas of Montenegro, for the purpose of embarrassing the great powers, which had stolidly announced that Montenegro should not have Scutari and that Albania must be good and take whatever king the great powers might choose for her.

Nicholas and Essad agreed between them that Scutari should become Montenegrin, so far as Albania was concerned, and that Essad Pasha should proclaim himself King of Albania with the tacit consent of the Montenegrins. As it happens, the great powers have been able to sit rather hard upon little Montenegro's plea to retain Scutari, which she certainly won with her life-blood; but so far they have been unable to devise any way to get around Essad Pasha'a proclamation of royalty. That astute person maneuvered himself into an apparently impregnable moral position before he took the step. To one who looks at the matter from a disinterested, sporting point of view it is difficult to see how outsiders can legitimately push him from his throne—that is, without administering the referendum and recall to the voters of Albania and securing their consent.

To begin with, Essad Pasha is himself an Albanian and a member of one of the strongest mountain-tribes of the Malissori Confederation. He is known from one end of the country to the other. While not exactly an ideal character, as ideal characters are understood in Western countries, he is a very strong man and a first-rate soldier. He knows the country he has set himself to rule over, and he knows the people. Finally, he marched out of Scutari with an army of 30,000 well-armed men, provided with artillery and ammunition, and a man with 30,000 veteran soldiers at his back is in a position to say what he wants. If the mountain-tribes back him up there is no question but that he will be able to resist any European efforts to oust him, perhaps for years to come.

The only serious foe he has to fear is Djavid Pasha, the commander of the wreck of the Turkish army of Central Macedonia, who escaped into Albania with a force estimated at 10,000 men. It has been said that Djavid Pasha contemplated joining forces with Essad, but later authentic reports have described Djavid as being in conflict with Essad's troops, and it may be that the two will fight until one or the other is crushed. The condition of affairs is further complicated by the fact that Turkey has practically abandoned all claim to Albania, and has issued orders to the commanders of all Turkish troops to embark them at the nearest port for Asia Minor. In other words, Albania is a no-man's land, just now. If Essad or Djavid chooses to disregard the Sultan's orders, the Sultan is not in a position to punish either of them. Then too, the European powers are timorous of taking the first step, realizing that an expedition to Albania would be costly and perhaps productive of international trouble.

It will be interesting to see what happens to Essad—King Essad, he should be called now, for he has formally adopted the style and title. As a reformed brigand he should be eminently fitted to rule over his countrymen, who, according to their Slavonic neighbors, make "the finest thieves and murderers in the world." He sizes up somehow as the kind of man who might be fitted for the job of ruling a hard-tempered, hard-headed, hard-fisted people. Neither Skanderbeg nor Ali Pasha was angelic in character, if history does not err.

But—and this is the element of uncertainty that lurks largest—nobody yet knows what the Albanians themselves think of the man who has declared himself their king. If they decide that he is a man after their own hearts, well and good. If they do not, it is scarcely likely that even with 30,000 men Essad will be able to force their allegiance, when Shefket Pasha and the ablest generals of the Young Turks, with 100,000 men at their disposal, were unable to crush the Malissori alone.

Not only this, but another complication which faces Essad—and, of course, Europe and Albania too—is the candidacy of several other men, all of them sufficiently important to warrant serious consideration. This complication is still more complicated in turn by the unknown attitude of the interested great powers toward the several claimants. It may be that Essad has mortally offended Austria or Italy or some other nation, and that he will have to face a campaign of intrigue that will be too

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strong for him. There is good reason to suppose that a native ruler will not appeal to either Italy or Austria, which have ideas of their own respecting Albania and its destiny. They want a foreigner who will listen to outside advice, and be amenable to outside influence. Is it likely that they will be partial to an Albanian king who will be himself an Albanian?

THE STUFF THAT KINGS ARE MADE OF

THERE is no want of kingly material lying handy if they should succeed in tipping Essad off the throne he has grabbed. Genealogically speaking, none of the pretenders has so good a claim as Don Juan Aladro, Marquis Castriota, former Spanish diplomat and the only living direct descendant of Skanderbeg. Aladro is very wealthy; moreover, his diplomatic career has brought him into close touch with most of the European governments, so that he undoubtedly can claim to have the experience necessary for a statesmanlike administration of his country. The chief question is whether he would care to abandon the luxurious security of his life on his estates in Spain and in his palaces at Rome and Paris for the risk and hardship that would be the portion of Albania's king.

Those who know Aladro say that he will make no move on his own account to gain the crown his ancestor wore, but that if a *bona-fide* offer of it should be made to him, countersigned by the Great Powers, he would consider it. However it is not thought likely that he would be selected, except as a last resort, for he is an old man with no children and his line would die out with him.

A prince who is every inch a man and who would undoubtedly measure up to all requirements in this particular case is Luigi, Duca degli Abruzzi, the Italian explorer and naval officer, who once tried to marry a plain American girl. Young, brave, hardy, aggressive in personality, with plenty of common sense and grit, Abruzzi is the best type of what a prince can be. He is also a sportsman through and through, and as a scientist has won international recognition.

His candidacy is not a result of his own efforts, but of the enthusiasm of a group of Italian sympathizers with Albania, who would naturally like to see one of their countrymen on its throne. It is not considered probable that his name will be received with any vast amount of approval in Austria, where the last thing desired is the seating of an Albanian ruler who will be pro-Italian rather than pro-Austrian.

Prince Napoleon Bonaparte is not a newcomer among the Albanian pretenders. His name has been mentioned in this connection for some years past. It is well known that the French Government has given tacit consent to several schemes to win for him the leadership of the unruly mountain people. As the head of the Bonaparte family and imperial pretender to the French throne, the men who pull the wires from the Quai d'Orsay would like to see him suitably provided for elsewhere.

But while Napoleon listened with interest to such suggestions some years back, he is not expected to show much interest in them these days. He has achieved the great aim of his life, marriage with Princess Clotilde of Belgium, and he would vastly prefer to live comfortably with her on the ample fortune he possesses, than spend the middle period of his life knight-erranting.

Another prince advocated for the vacant throne is Waldemar of Denmark, brother of the late King George of Greece, who comes of a family that have given several rulers to new nations and that are connected by blood or marriage with practically every ruling house in Europe. Waldemar is not a young man. So long ago as 1887 he was offered the Bulgarian throne, but made the great mistake of declining it at the "suggestion"—*i. e.*, demand—of the Czar of Russia.

Waldemar is the kind of man who would be a safe and sane ruler. Also, he is a Lutheran, and therefore would be acceptable to the Albanians from a religious point of view for the reason that as he does not belong to any one of their three religions he would not be liable to suspicion of partiality. But it is certain that Austria looks upon him with distaste because of his connection with the Czar of Russia and the ruling family of Greece.

This exhausts the list of European princes who have been mentioned as kingly timber within the last few days. There are plenty of others available though, even if their names have not appeared in print, and it may be that some dark horse, like Prince Arthur of Connaught, or Prince William of Sweden, will have nosed in before these

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words are in print. A British prince would probably be the best for Albania, so far as the country itself is concerned; but it must be borne in mind that Albania's interests are considered as second to those of near-by predatory powers.

Arthur's name is understood to have been circulated privately in connection with the Albanian throne; but he has never made any formal announcement that he would be a candidate. Nor is it likely that he would. The British Cabinet thinks for its princes. As for the Swede, he is royally eligible. He has, besides, a beautiful and wealthy wife. Perhaps the recollection that his ancestor, Bernadotte, founder of his house, won a crown by sheer personal force would serve to add zest to the venture for him.

ISMAIL KEMIL, THE MAN WHO WAS

MENTION was made some time back of a man who was one of the two most powerful men in Albania to-day, Ismail Kemil Bey. (The other man, of course, is Essad Pasha.) Ismail Kemil was practically ruler of Albania until Essad Pasha proclaimed himself king, but he never pretended to any regal dignity. As deputy in the Young Turk Parliament, from Albania, he always played a prominent *rôle* in urging his country's interests, and after war broke out last Fall he became president of a local governing committee that attempted more or less successfully to administer the national affairs.

Ismail is an Albanian Moslem who does not pull a very strong oar with the mountain-tribes. His hold is in the south, where the great land-owning families and their adherents early enlisted under his banner, where Moslems hold the balance of power. He was abroad when Essad Pasha made his sensational deal with King Nicholas, and he did not attempt to conceal his hurt astonishment and anger at such a proceeding. Now if Ismail Kemil is really one of those convenient puppets the Austrians use for accomplishing their own purposes in a land they have cast a speculative eye upon, his grief may be regarded as Austria's grief. He is a strong man, with a very considerable following, but he has never been able even to pretend to represent the consensus of Albanian sentiment, and he probably never will, for the simple reason that many of his countrymen distrust him. Also, he lacks a certain ruthless streak in his character that any Albanian must possess to rule over any portion of his kindred.

His ambition was to be President of Albania. He didn't have the imagination to attempt the achievement of a crown, or perhaps he realized that he lacked the personality. But what his ambition was, does not particularly matter now, as he is hopelessly out of the running. His name is mentioned solely as another addition to the long list of those who have striven to attain some sort of leadership over Albania, only to disappear precipitately into oblivion. A lawyer and a commoner, he makes a strange contrast in this glittering array of soldiers, princes and adventurers.

Here you have the picture, then:

A bleak, barren land of soaring mountains, mist-wreathed and crowned with ancient stone castles with walls three feet thick; a land of tall, eagle-eyed men, who shave their heads, with the exception of a single long war-lock pendent from the back; a land of blood, mystery and unrest.

And this land lacks a king. For 2,000 years it has lacked a king, although many men have tried to be king and failed. It offers the last vacant throne in Europe.

But the man who tries to sit upon that throne must be more than a king. He must be a man, an all-around man, who can cow the Malissori chieftains and make the feudal lords of the south understand that his will is superior to theirs when it runs counter to their interests. Furthermore, he must keep them all from quarreling and sacrificing scores of lives over the theft of a lamb.

It will be a first-class adventure for the man who tries it, whoever he may be, and for the men who go with him—lucky fellows! Personally, I wish him all good luck, whether he be Essad Pasha, with his 30,000 tired, war-worn *askares* at his back; or Abruzzi, Aladro, Waldemar, the Englishman, Prince Arthur; yes, even Ghika. Because, after all, the man who fills this job has got to make good—and the mere making good in a job like this ought to blot out any smears on a man's past.

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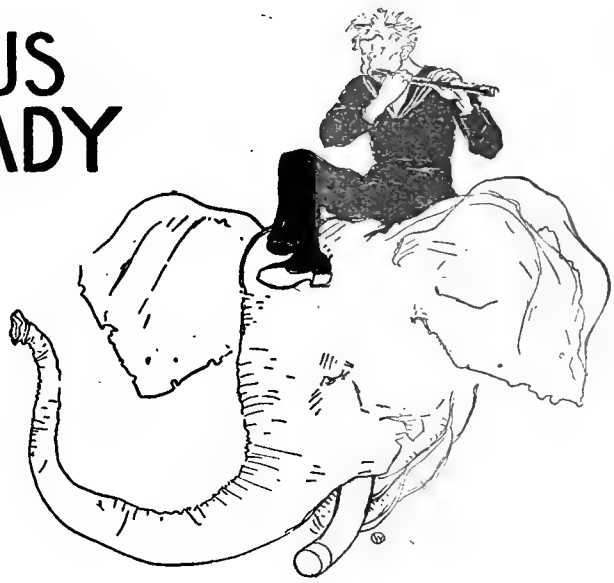
ORPHEUS O'GRADY

By Wilbur Daniel Steele



THE ex-ordinary-seaman dangled his legs over the edge of the dock and regarded darkly the retreating form of the revenue-cutter's launch.

"Never again," he pronounced, "*never*. I've put in five enlistments an' never a ghost of a permotion, an' now I quit. A man ain't got no chanct. I never knowed but one *man* ever to get permoted, an' that was Rinny O'Grady. What about him? Well, *this* about him:

RINNY O'GRADY used to quit the service, too, reg'lar every time his time run out. The trouble with him was he couldn't stay quit. Soon's he got ashore an' comf'table full, he use to buy a flute an' march down State Street in column o' fours, callin' fer his papers. An' the ship's-writer allus had 'em ready fer him. When he come out o' one o' them spells an' found out where he was, back again, he use' to carry on sumpin' frightful.

"Oi bin dhrugged an' parsecuted be th' Gov'mint," he use to open up, an' that's a sign he was comin' round all right.

"Oi'm goin' aft an' break in th' ahrsenal an' blow this ship t' flames er glory," he says next, an' we put him up to do it, becus he most allus run into the C. O. digestin' on the quarter-deck, after which he'd come back an' listen to reason.

"Oi'm a victim av th' Raypublican Parthy," says he. "They've kipt me here foorteen year widout so much as a sthripe 't me ar-r-m——" An' he'd shake his fist in the air an' the whole for'rd part of the vessel'd shake with him. Rinny's a big man.

"Republican Party nothin'," says I to him, time after time. "Between me an' you an' the foot of the mast, what you want to do is to cut out the music. Yer name ain't right an' yer hair ain't long enough. Give it up," says I.

"Lad," says he, takin' off his cap, "Oi'll do ut—Oi give ye th' wor-r-d." An' next shore-leave he'd climb on the water-wagon an' sell back the flute to the store where he got it.

But I never knowed it to fail, the follow'n' pay-day, to see Rinny O'Grady come marchin' down State Street, flanked by a couple of ward-room boys, an' him tootlin' the national anthem of Cork on that same warp-sided flute.

I ain't a doubt the Department held things agin him an' kept him down accordin'. I told him's much's that after the cold night when he played "Fire-Quarters" in the ward-room companionway. He had 'em all out in their pajamas that night.

"Any more o' these antics, my man," says the li'tenant to him, "an' the Service'll have

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to get along without you. This is the last warnin'," says he, "so take note of it."

"Glo-r-r-ry be t' th' saints," says Rinny. "If Oi can't git out meself, Oi c'n git shooved out mebby."

But next pay-day he handed the whole month over to me an' went to a movin'-picture show. That was April, when we was layin' up after the Winter-cruisin', all hands paintin' an' scrapin' an' overhaulin' general, which is hard on the temper. But Rinny managed to pull through the month somehow, without doin' more'n pound the boys' heads together a trifle.

It never come into my head that he could pull it off again, but he done it. Come pay-day, he forked over the month. Well, first the officers an' then the Department begun to look up an' take notice.

"You fer a quartermaster," says I to him one day. "Sure's shootin', if you can only hang on a bit longer."

"Faith, lad," says he, chewin' his thumbs, "Oi misdoubt ut'll do me little good. Oi'll doy av th' thir-r-st befoor th' ind av ut, Oi shouldn't wonder."

But mostly he was perfane an' very bad-tempered.

WELL, along come the next month, an' with it the regatta. Regattas is fine days fer us—that is fer the officers, what with all the ladies they invite out an' all the backwoods Congressmen that invite themselves—a cutter's the one best bet to see a boat-race from. This time they was three cutters in the harbor—ourn, an' the *Soberly* from Woods Hole an' the *Huron* from Portsm'th. An' the Department bugs they was there. Lord *Henry!* They was the Cap'n-Commandant hisself, an' the Chief Engineer an' runnin' down from them half a dozen smaller ones, an' a couple of Senators fer good measure. They was stayin' aboard the *Huron*, but they all come over to inspect us at "quarters" the second day—but I'm gettin' ahead of myself.

The day before that was pay-day, an' the night of pay-day—he couldn't 've picked out a worse time in his life—Rinny fell off the wagon.

Mebby you think we didn't train in fer shore when we found he was gone. I had a misgivin' at first sight of the dock—it was black with people. When we come up close in the boat, there was a new cop layin' out on the wharf, an' Rinny O'Grady settin' atop of him playin' selections.

"Hi," says the bo's'n's mate, speakin' easy, "you got sumpin' on your mind, Rinny?"

Rinny stopped right in the middle of "Il Troviter."

"Sh-h—hush," says he. "Oi'm a gawd. Oi'm Orpheush. Shee how quiet sh baste'sh layin'."

Well, we went aboard the cutter with him, an' the deck-officer—little Gorman it was—he give us the pickle-eye.

"Seems to me you might 've led this animal into the woods somewhere," says he, kind of to himself an' lookin' away to'rds the *Huron*. He was thinkin' of the big inspection comin', an' a drunk-an'-disorderly in the brig.

"Aye, aye, sir; yes, sir," says Swanson, "but they was only four of us, an' Mr. O'Grady wanted to come aboard."

"Quite right," says the li'tenant, sarcastic as anything. "Send the master-at-arms to me."

I trotted for'rd an' raked out the master-at-arms, an' when I got back with him I see the ship's Doctor speakin' in little Gorman's ear. The li'tenant scratched the end of his nose an' seemed doubtful over sumpin' 'r other, but in the end he says to the doctor:

"I wouldn't say it was possible, doc, but you can go on an' try it."

So Rinny didn't go to the brig.

He was pretty near paralyzed that evenin', an' paralyzed *on to* the flute—nothin' short of an operation would have pried it off him, an' the Doctor didn't want to operate. But that doc was a hard-workin' cuss, no gettin' around it. When mornin' come he had Rinny so's you could stand him up against sumpin' an' he'd stay there fer's much 's a minute at a time. I never see a sorer human than Rinny that mornin'.

"To —— wid th' Gov'mint," says he to me, very low an' difficult an' fixin' me with a stained-glass eye. "Here Oi've tied the can to me own tail, an' th' thrayters'll not lit me enj'y ut. Lad, me career's rooned an' Oi'm far-r-r f'm well."

The big race was listed fer that mornin', an' about nine o'clock out come the ladies in platoons an' companies, an' mixed with 'em the Li'tenant-Gov'nor an' a dozen Congressmen and a couple of Senators, and the joy was unconfined.

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At two the boat come alongside from the *Huron* with the bugs in it, an' we had "Quarters" sounded. That was the big inspection of the year. The boat-deck was jammed with white vests an' straight-fronts. The C. O. stood up aft with his hair parted slick an' a hand on his chest. Us men was lined along the rails. Sumpin' seemed to be hitchin' somewheres. The man to my left whispered in my ear that they was tryin' to find Rinny O'Grady. "Rinny's at large," says he.

I'll never know whether they'd've found Rinny er not, er how that inspeck would've come off. It's just at that minute the wireless-man come runnin' out of his cove an' bust up to the "execk" with a yeller message in his hand. The "execk" passed it on to the C. O., an' the C. O. looked like he just lost his most promisin' child. He run it through two er three times, mebby thinkin' he could make it read different, an' then he ambled up to the Cap'n-Commandant an' told him the worst.

"Ladies an' gentleman," says the Cap'n-Commandant to them on the boat-deck, "I invite you all aboard the *Huron*. This ship's got to get out of here."

WELL, when we got the order to fall out I took a streak for the wireless-house. I knew my old sparring-partner there'd put me next.

"Gussie," says I, "the old man's forgot what that note was, already, an' he ast me to come an' get it again."

"Go on, or'nary seaman," says Gussie. "Go on an' get out o' here. Gov'ment c'munications ain't fer such as you. But if they *was* a vessel ashore at Spankin' Head now, I wouldn't wonder if they'd 'a' called us up—what d'you think?"

"Go on yerself," I give back. "This time o' year? An' the weather like this? Come again, Gussie."

But I couldn't get no more out of him. They's still quite a number of nuts follerin' the sea, an' a craft *might* have made out to climb Spankin' Head if all hands was asleep an' the skipper soused.

An' them officers—I never see such a wild bunch in my life. It ain't quite fair to have wrecks in the Summer-time, anyway, and they was to be a band concert that afternoon an' a dance that evenin', an' ladies, an' the flowin' bowl, an' they was sore as pups. But we went through—forced-draught fer Spankin' Head—an' Rinny hadn't come to light yet.

We made the run in a trifle over an hour, which is some movin' fer the old *Sioux*, an' it's just's well we did. What we found was a middle-aged tramp steamer hung up on a rock straight off the Head, an' fillin' fast.

They wasn't a sign of nobody aboard of her. I see the "execk" lookin' her over, an' then the quartermaster touched him on the elbow an' called his attention to the beach where they was a number of black specks cavortin' around. He h'isted up his glass an' give a look at them specks, then he turned a funny green color. He wiped off both ends of the glass with a han'kerchief an' tried again. Then he handed it to the Q. M.

"Bjornsen," says he, "what d'you make out of it?"

Bjornsen's one of the solemnest kinds of Squareheads, but this time he bust out laughin' an' hollerin'.

"Ben Garden f'm Eden," says he.

"Hey there, you good-fer-nothin' pup," I says, grabbin' the cabin-boy, who happened to be near me, "where's them glasses of the bo's'n's he told me to tell you to get on his wash-stand? Beat it!"

When he got back I trained 'em on the shore. First thing, I picked up a good United States sand-hill with a couple of skinny camels settin' atop of it, eyin' each other sorrerful. They had a red kind of ribbons around their necks, an' I could tell from that far away they was talkin' over the weather.

"Won'erful!" says I, keepin' my head. "Try again."

I tried another spot, an' there was a small yeller boy scrubbin' off a small yeller lion with a towel he'd borried from the life-savin' crew, I s'pect.

"Lions is li'ble to catch cold," says I.

Well, they was red people an' yeller an' black an' white people there, an' they was about three-quarters of a tiger an' monkeys of assorted sizes.

"I wouldn't 've thought it of you—never," says I, lookin' at that there rusty old tramp boat an' keepin' calm.

About then come back the "third," who'd been over with a boat-crew to board her. He was lookin' kind of queer.

"Nobody aboard of her, Mr. Betts?" says the C. O.

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"Yes, sir," says the "third." "They's one man, sir."

The old man looked like he'd swallered a tack.

"May I *ast*, Mr. Betts," says he, "just why you didn't bring this person off? Did he per*ferr* to stay, mebby?"

"No, sir, he wanted to come, bad enough. He's a black man, an' too scared to say a word, sir, an' he's moanin' an' hollerin' in a bin below, with the back end of a won'erful mad elephant sittin' in the doorway of it. I come back fer orders, sir."

"Um hum," says the C. O., slickin' his chin. "We got to get that man somehow. Quartermaster, ask 'em ashore what we shall do."

The Q. M. waggled his flag a bit, talkin' with the life-savers.

"They say to save the elephant, sir," says he.

"Take yer men back, Mr. Betts, an' get that *man* out," says the C. O., chumpin' around the bridge an' lookin' like Napoleon. "An'," says he, "take yer revolvers."

When they got back aboard the steamer, the boat's crew went down into the hatch, in solid formation. Then in a couple of seconds they come out, one at a time, an' some of 'em with nothin' much on. The li'tenant come out last, like an officer ought, an' the minute he hit the deck he begun blushin', an' no wonder.

"Don't seem to be doin' much," says the C. O. "Tell 'em to shoot, quartermaster."

"Aye, sir," says the Q. M., "An' pardon, sir, but they say ashore that he's very val'able—the elephant, that is, sir."

"Tell 'em to shoot," comes the C. O. again, chumpin' some more. "The law is clear."

THE boat's crew set down around that open hatch an' begun poppin' off their guns, takin' turns like at a shootin'-gallery. We could see 'em. Bimeby the battle slacked up an' one of 'em commenced wigwaggin' to the cutter.

"He says the amminition's all gone," says the quartermaster to the old man.

"An' the elephant?" he ast.

"Very mad," says the Q. M.

"Tell 'em to go down again," says the C. O.

But they didn't get no chancet. The tramp went down instead, like a shot, 's if it'd slid off sumpin' all of a sudden. When we got to 'em in a rescue-boat, that crew was settin' around on private rafts an' hatches an' cussin' the animal kingdom in general, an' in special the elephant that was cruisin' around in their midst with a black man in a turban an' nighty hangin' to his tail.

We picked up the men here an' there, an' then started a rescue-party fer the night-shirt gentleman, only about that time the elephant got his eye on us. We beat him back to the cutter by about two lengths. I never knowed they could sail so fast before. Bein's I was the oldest man that happened to tumble into the rescue-boat, I reported her back to the old man. He was standin' with his eye on the animal, which was cuttin' wide circles around the cutter, with Nighty bringin' up the rear.

"They say he's worth a forchin," says the Q. M., readin' off the shore.

"H'm-m-m," says the C. O. "Get out the launch-falls an' h'ist him aboard."

Now lemme tell you, fishin' a wild elephant out of the drink ain't any job fer a lady. But we done it. We swung him up an' wrapped twenty fathom of chain cable around him an' set him down on the deck, for'rd, just abaft the for'rd hatch an' facin' the wheel-house. Then we got under way fer port, forced-draught again, on account of the dance. The black man was dead to the world. We had to pry his hands off the animal's tail. Then we took him into the chart-room an' started to pour him out.

Bimeby he showed signs of life. When the li'tenant see him comin' around he started in on furren languages. He tried on about seven of 'em, but couldn't seem to connect. The black man kep' shakin' his head at every one.

"He must be from Afghanistan" says little Gorman, rubbin' his ear.

"No, Ah ain't, Jedge," says the black man, brightenin' up. "Ah's f'm Menphus, Jedge, an' Ah'd lak to go back dere ef——"

"You get out of here an' 'tend to that animal," says little Gorman, very rough because some of the men was sniggerin'.

"Lawd a-massy, Jedge, don' mek me go out dere! Ah ain't de reg'lah keepah. He's dayd. De circus-folks jes' made me dress up in dese-yeah c'ntraptions to fool him—an', Jedge, Ah cain't seem to fool him. Ah'd lak ve'y much to go back to——looky dere!"

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"What's the matter?" says little Gorman, takin' a squint at the elephant.

"Jedge, he's ontyin' dem chains fum hisse'f."

WE WAS jest a trifle too late in gettin' to him. One of the men went through the wheel-house window an' three down the companionway an' little Gorman lit on the bridge, an' that there elephant went to work an' coiled up all them hundreds o' dollars worth of chain, neat's a lady, an' hove 'em over the sta'board bow. Then he looked around him, kind of speculatin'.

He was goin' to have quite a bit of fun with the rapid-fire gun, for'rd, only he couldn't seem to get the cover off. So he wandered aft, kind of disgusted, an' glued an eye onto the cabin-skylight. The C. O. popped his head out of the companion an' just stood there, plain starin'.

"Hey, quit that," says he, after a bit, sort of foolish.

"With pleasure," says the elephant. "Shake hands."

But the old man fell backwards downstairs, an' not bein' able to reach him there, the elephant come back to the skylight, tapped a little hole in it, an' explored a bit with his trunk. All he fetched up was a couple of cigars an' an old magazine, but they seemed to amuse him tremendous.

"Gee," he says to himself, "this is a picnic, ain't it?"

So he let his trunk down one of the fire-room ventilators, an' the forced-draught fan took off no more'n a quarter of an inch of one little corner of it.

Honest, you'd 've thought that elephant was killed. He bawled like a baby an' blowed his nose, an' then he got rip-rarin' tearin' mad. He come up for'rd an' took hold of the weather-cloth around the bridge, an' off it come with one swipe, an' there's little Gorman exposed to view.

"Yah!" says the elephant. "You're the guy to blame fer all this!"

The li'tenant didn't stop to deny it. He took one dive through the connin'-hatch an' fetched up on the back of the hel'sman's neck. But that didn't help matters none. There's Mr. Elephant settin' right in front of the busted winder, an' his funnel all ready to snoop in an' grab 'em. It was a dead heat to the chart-room fer officer an' man.

That elephant ought to have been satisfied. He had the deck to himself. I guess he was. From where I was peekin' out of the for'rd companion, his rear elevation had an amused look to it. Every time his trunk struck sumpin' entertainin' in the wheel-house you could tell it by the way his little two-fer-a-nickel tail cut a dido in the air. The wheel tickled him to death—an' by the same token, that ship begun to sail over the sea in figger-eights an' spread-eagles that would've made a perfessional card-writer dizzy.

Now the islands outside here ain't the proper place to be cavortin' around permiscuous with a forced-draught on. Y' see, all the speakin'-tubes is on the bridge er in the wheel-house. The chart-room sets right abaft the wheel-house, an' then there ain't nothin' else on deck but the funnels. So the li'tenant's complement was marooned, so to speak, an' the folks below in the engine-room, all innocent, whooped her up all-bent-fer-election, with an eye on that there dance in port.

It's only the finger of Providence an' the changeable mind of that elephant we didn't bump into every last island to the east'rd of the harbor, an' I guess it got on little Gorman's nerves. I see him come out of the after-door of the chart-room, an' I see the animal grab him by one foot an' gently but firmly sling him back through the same door. Then the critter fetched up an' sort of scratched his head, so to speak.

"Here," says he to himself, "let's look this thing over an' not be so hasty.

"Right you are," says he, an' stickin' his feeler in again, he drawed the li'tenant out an' set him down quiet in the middle of the deck. He didn't know just what to do with him, an' little Gorman didn't either, after that slam through the door.

Well, you can believe us fellers in the for'rd-companion was feelin' kind of funny. I see the hel'sman sneaking out into the wheel-house, but we wasn't puttin' in much time thinkin' where the ship was goin'. There was little Gorman, 's good an officer 's you'd want to see, layin' there in front of our eyes.

"Out we go," says somebody behind me.

"All in a bunch," says somebody else.

I took a long swig of air an' got ready. A full-sized elephant ain't no lap-dog. Then I hear that black man's voice, shiverin' an' full of tears.

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"Foh de Lawd's sake, ge'mmen, don' go foh to do it. Pray t' Gawd, but don' show yoah face, massahs. Ef yoh do, et's all up wuth de Jedge."

An' there we was. I tell you, matey, that was about as funny a fix as I want usual—scared to do nothin' an' not to do nothin'. That there awkward, slab-sided, heathen animal rubbed his ear an' thought about it an' thought it over an' wrapped his trunk around little Gorman an' undid it, an' then he tightened up sudden, like he was struck with an idee.

"All up, boys," I sung out. "We might's well jump him now——"

But just when I said that "now," sumpin happened. I'd 've swore it was a fairy-tale if I hadn't see it with my own two eyes. Just while that word was in my mouth, sumpin' come out of the air an' hit that elephant on top of the head. You don't know what it was? No, you don't. It was a high black bottle, s'prisin' like the kind the ward-room-steward harbors in his locker.

THE elephant looked up in the air, confused an' su'prised, an' I looked up an' so did all the others. An' there was a head stickin' over the edge of the crow's-nest, up the foremast.

"Baisht av th' joongle," says the head, "shtop where ye arre an' lishten t' yer gawd."

There was never any mistakin' that head—it was Rinny O'Grady, his eyes lookin' four different ways apiece, one ear hangin' down like a cocker span'el's, an' his mouth won'erful humorous.

"Mushic," says he, wavin' that everlastin' flute, "mushic hash charrmsh t' shoosh sh' savige brist."

Then, with his eyes fixed mainly on the top of the mast, he begun tootlin' "Kelly," but slow an' sorrerful, as becomin' of a gawd, an' like a funeral-march, an' unthinkable rotten.

Well, my eyes just about bust out of my head to see that there elephant. His ears stood out from his head like a couple of piazzas, an' he nodded an' twirled his trunk an' shivered when Rinny come across a special bum note, like a Guinney barber at the opery.

He set there quiet till Rinny had Kelly dead an' buried an' was doin' the "Blue Danube" with private variations. Then he rolled over to the foot of the mast an' rubbed his back agin it, fer all the world like a tom-cat.

"Darrlint," says Rinny, rovin' one eye over the nest, "come up an' shee me—come t' sh' arrmsh av Orpheush."

Rinny come half-way down that mast before he missed a step. Then he hit the seat of his pants an' the deck, still tootlin'.

"Good-by, matey," says I. The animal had his handle around Rinny's middle in the wink of an eye. "You been good shipmates, Rinny O'Grady," says I.

But I might 've saved my breath. Up goes Rinny on the back of the elephant's neck, slick's a whistle, an' the percession moved aft to "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

Right then we out an' got little Gorman, an' we done it fast. We could hear Rinny hollerin' into the ward-room companion. I b'lieve he was invitin' the officers out to have a look at a Demicrat. I don't know—he was carryin' on scand'lous anyhow.

It was beginnin' to get dark by this time, so we could hear 'em more'n we could see 'em, comin' for'rd. Every time Rinny give a special kind of grunt we knowed he'd fell off again. Then that nice patient elephant would stop an' pick him up, tender's a mother. They come up an' stopped right in the middle of the for'rd deck, the elephant standin' there swingin' a little to one side er the other as the tune moved him, an' Rinny O'Grady atop of his head discoursin' music, the most splendid an' rotten I ever hear from man er machine.

AN' SO come into port. We slid into our berth between the *Huron* an' the *Soberly*, an' they was all lit up, the both of 'em, an' jammed with people gettin' ready fer the dances, an' all of 'em starin' at us. I don't wonder! We must've been the queerest-lookin' United States revenue-cutter that ever sailed the ocean. Exceptin' the hel'sman in the wheel-house, they wasn't a livin' soul to see above-decks but that there big, dreamy-eyed, blue hulk of an elephant, with a purple Irishman settin' on his head rippin' out long spasms of perfane music.

We finally got up nerve to go out an' sling a chain around the animal's left hind foot, because we see a boat comin' away from the *Huron*. That elephant never knew we was there—not till we grabbed Rinny off his neck. Then he give a bleat like a worried calf, an' that's all.

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Well, all the officers, even little Gorman, with a rag around his head, was on the quarter-deck by the time the Cap'n-Commandant came over the side. They was all so bunched up I couldn't hear what they said, but I could see they was talkin' over the war.

"Here," says I to myself, after a minute, "I b'lieve one of them officers is wavin' me to come closer."

I got a good imagination.

Then I hear the Cap'n-Commandant talkin':

"Ain't this the chap we been hearin' about at the Department lately, Cap'n?" he says to the old man.

"Ordinary seaman O'Grady," says the C. O. "I wouldn't wonder if it was."

"I wish you'd have him come here," says the Cap'n-Commandant, with a Santy Claus look on his face.

I see little Gorman shakin' his head on the sly, an' the ship's Doctor was waggin' his too, an' the "third" was tryin' to nudge the C. O., who wasn't on to the game. But he was rubbin' his hands an' feelin' elegant.

"Surely, sir," says he. "I'll have him right away up."

Then the Doctor butted in.

"Pardon, sir," he says, "but the man's sick—nervous prostration an' exposure," says he, lyin' like a gentleman.

The C. O. made a joke of it, rubbin' his hands an' lookin' Santy Claus himself.

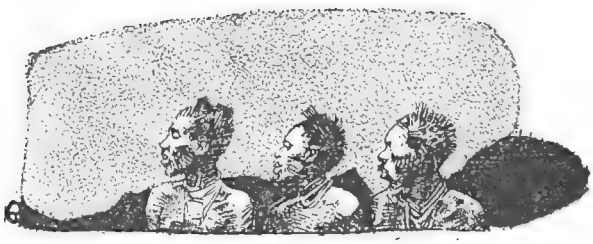
"I guess what he gets up here won't hurt him any," says he, winkin' to the Cap'n-Commandant.

So they brought Rinny up an' stood him between a couple of stout seamen, so's he wouldn't throw the game by fallin' down. The bands played on the *Huron* an' *Soberly* an' it was gay an' festival, an' there in the dark between, Rinny O'Grady got the stripe to his arm, an' him knowin' nothin' of it because he's so taken up with tryin' to get the flute loose from little Gorman, who hung on to it from behind fer dear life. Seems all the time Rinny thought the Cap'n-Commandant was a kangaroo, an' wanted to——

THE eyes of the ex-ordinary seaman fell upon an approaching boat. He regarded it for a moment with some uneasiness. Then he looked about him at the buildings of the city in which he was a free and untrammeled citizen of a great republic.

"You know, I b'lieve I'll jest run out an' say good-by to the boys once more," he ventured.

There was something propitiatory and unconvincing in his air and tone.



THIEVES WHO LAUGH

AN AFRICAN TRIBAL CUSTOM

THOUGH the Banyoro tribe of Africa are brave, they are inveterate thieves. They are very subtle in their methods of carrying out their thefts; very crafty in concealing their guilt. Their favorite motto is "keep a grave face even though you laugh behind your hand."

On one occasion a Banyoro stole two cows from a missionary. He was charged with the offense but steadfastly denied it. He even went so far as to offer to undergo their favorite ordeal by poison, but the missionary was just as crafty. He had in his possession a small electric battery, and told the culprit that if he had stolen the two cows it would be impossible for him to hold the handles of the battery.

After the man had allowed himself to be twisted into painful contortions, he could stand it no longer and confessed. A little later, when he had brought back the stolen cows, he asked if he could borrow the "machine which makes men tell the truth," for if he could apply this test to his brothers he thought he could find a lot more stolen cows.

——*W. Robert Foran.*

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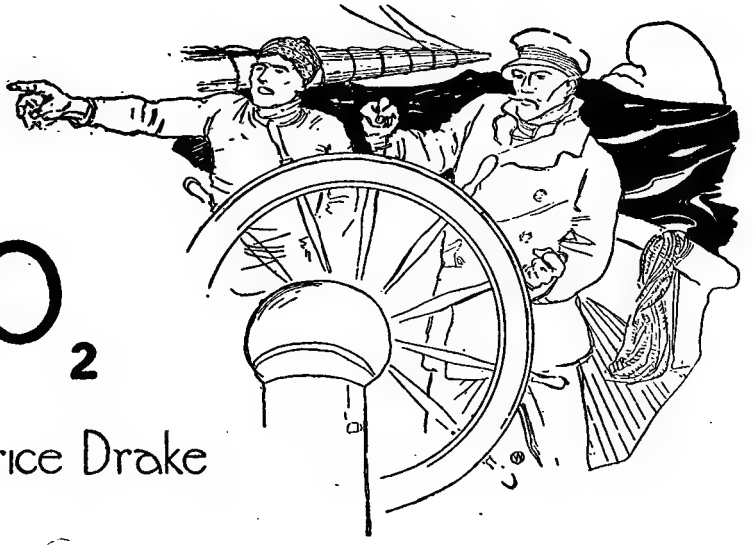

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By Maurice Drake

CHAPTER XXXIII

ON SECRET SERVICE

HAVING an hour at a loose end while the *Luck and Charity* was lying at Erith, I thought I'd go out and call at Pamily Brand's lodgings, but I had my walk for nothing. She had gone to Birmingham, the landlady thought, and would I leave any message? I gave her my name, asked her to tell Miss Brand I had called, and then went back aboard, feeling rather disappointed and more depressed than ever. What with Ward and Miss Brand gone, and with my worrying about Voogdt, and my dislike of this new member of the crew—the London waster who was baying on the trail of dangerous secret service—I didn't feel overcheerful.

"What's up next?" I kept asking myself.

When I got back to the *Luck and Charity* it was dusk, and though I saw two men standing on the quayside as I went aboard I didn't take any particular notice of them. But no sooner had I lit the lamp in my cabin than I heard feet jump on the deck and there came a light knock on the lid of the companion.

"Who's there?" I called.

"Cap'n West aboard?" somebody called down the stair.

"Yes. Come in," I answered.

THE feet stumbled down the narrow stairway and two men entered the cabin. One was a tall lantern-jawed chap, with a little tooth-brush of a mustache, and strong spectacles which magnified his eyes and made them look like an owl's, large and blinking. The other was short and spare, with a pale clean-shaven face, dark eyes and hair and a big forehead. He looked a sulky, ill-conditioned, clever beast, and I disliked him at sight. The tall man I rather fancied. His spectacles gave him an air of amiability, as spectacles often do; and he reminded me a little of Ward, which was all in his favor. Even in this first moment of seeing them I thought to myself that it was just as well I liked one of Voogdt's selections, for I naturally guessed at once who they were.

"Cap'n West?" said the tall man, beaming through his glasses.

I took down the book with my signature, the one that had convinced Sellick, and laid the fly-leaf before them without a word. Spectacles looked it over carefully and deliberately, as if it had been some wonderful old manuscript and it was a privilege to read it. The other man just glanced at it, and no more.

"Either of you Mainwaring?" I asked.

The spectacled man beamed and smiled again as much as to say he was Mainwaring and very pleased to be able to say so.

"Colley?" I turned to the other, and

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got a grunt and a scowl by way of answer.

"You must pardon my friend," the other cut in, waving a hand toward him like a Master of Ceremonies at a negro ball. "He's just gone through a trying time—very trying. He's——"

The other turned toward him savagely.

"Shut your fool head," he snarled, and again it struck me I'd shipped a pleasant party aboard for once.

"I suppose you've got some sort of credentials or instructions?" I asked.

"I've a letter here from our mutual friend, dear old Voogdt," the Mainwaring man said, fumbling in an inner pocket.

His smooth way began to irritate me, in spite of the liking I had taken to the look of him. Later I found everybody was a dear old chap, according to him, or a dear fellow. He was too affable, by half. After an hour or two of his dear-old-this and dear-old-that, one turned to Sellick's jerky talk or Colley's sulks with positive relief. We English are like that, I think. If you take to a man at first sight it's odds you change your mind about him later on, and very often men you dislike at the start turn out to be right good fellows at bottom.

Voogdt's note to Mainwaring was longer than the other I had seen.

Go and dig up Harry Colley—I've forgotten his address—and the pair of you go to Erith the afternoon after you get this and find out James Carthew West, skipper of the *Luck and Charity*, coasting-ketch, who will give you a passage to Terneuzen, on the south bank of the Scheldt. Don't attract notice, and obey West's instructions to the letter.

"WHAT are the instructions?" Mainwaring asked, when I handed back the letter.

"I've got to take you to Terneuzen and drop you there. That's all I know. If necessary, you're to desert."

"And what are we to do now?"

"I don't know," I said. "Make yourselves scarce, I should think. I can't ship three extra hands on a boat this size without people noticing it. You'd better clear out until Monday night, and then stow away forward until we sail."

"Three extra hands? Who's the third?"

"A chap who calls himself Sellick, and who joined this afternoon on Voogdt's recommendation, like yourselves. He's gone ashore now with my man. He knows you—both of you."

The two men looked at each other for a moment.

"What sort of looking chap is he?" Mainwaring asked curiously.

"Clean shaven and strongly built. About five foot ten. Wears blue serge and a Southern-and-Orient guernsey. Talks in jerks. Says 'I say, skipper,' at every third word."

"That fool!" Colley cut in.

"Oh, he's not such a fool," the amiable Mainwaring protested. "We know him, Captain. A dear old fellow—a bit of a dilettante, perhaps, but a dear fellow."

"He said you were a pair of rotters," I remarked. I thought that would stop his flow of affability, but it didn't.

"The dear old boy. That's only his pungent way of speaking; just a mannerism. And what part is he playing?"

"I don't know," I said again. "He's ordered to ship with me, and I've shipped him. That's all I know. I suppose I shall get further instructions at Terneuzen."

"And what's he been doing since he shipped with you?" asked Mainwaring.

For all his affability there was a tinge of annoyance in his voice.

"Winding up a hand-winch, helping unload clay all the afternoon," I said.

For some reason or other that didn't please either of them. You could see they were jealous of this Sellick for having got the start of them, and that same jealousy hung about them all the time we were together. As I found out later, Voogdt knew his men and had picked each of them for his own job.

I don't suppose any one else could have got the work out of them he did, and he couldn't have got it in any other way than this secret-service dodge. They were hungry to be helping in it; content to put up with cold and wet and short commons and monotonous waiting, just on the thin chance of being in real danger for once. Keen as boys playing Indians, they were, or millionaires stalking big game. Here these two were as jealous as women because Sellick had put in three hours on a hand-winch hoisting mud out of a coaster.

"Where's Voogdt now?" Colley asked.

He had scarcely spoken before.

"I don't know any more than you do," I said; and then I thought it wise to tell them the whole yarn from the moment 'Kiah had put him ashore.

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They listened in silence, but when I had done they both said they agreed with Sellick.

"He's all right. Don't you fear for him. It's a dark night when Austin Voogdt loses his way," was their verdict.

"I think so too," I said. "But I can't help worrying a bit. However, he'll be safe enough in Antwerp. Now hadn't you two better get ashore and out of sight?"

"Time enough," Mainwaring said. "There's nobody about. Let's go for'ard and see our old friend Sellick, his quarters."

THEY were standing up to go, and Colley had stretched a hand to the door when we heard the thump of feet on deck again. I pushed the others aside and put my head up the companion to find it was only Sellick and 'Kiah returning from their expedition. They went below into the fo'castle and I slipped back down the stair to let the others pass. As they reached the deck I heard a tinkling break out forward—stringed music of sorts—and the two men stopped like pointer dogs.

"He's brought his mandolin," said Mainwaring. "No objection to our paying a call on our old pal, is there, Cap'n?"

"I leave it to you," I said. "Use your own discretion. My man—'Kiah—he knows nothing, remember."

"Oh! . . . Well, I don't see why we can't pay a call. We know Mr. Sellick, A.B., or bo'sun, or whatever he calls himself. Why shouldn't we come aboard and see him?"

"No reason against it that I know of," I said.

"Good enough then. Come along, Colley," and they went forward on tiptoe, quiet as cats.

Half an hour later, feeling curious about them, I went forward and peeped down through the fo'castle companion. By the dim light of the swinging oil-lamp the place looked like an old Dutch picture. Sellick had upholstered the cold stove with a couple of sacks and was sitting on it, cross-legged, picking away at his mandolin and singing, singing rather well, too. 'Kiah sat on a box near by, smoking and looking at him with open admiration, and the other two were squatting knees to nose in the two empty bunks. The song came to an end just as I arrived, and Mainwaring praised it loudly.

"You can play the mandolin—er—Sellick. I'll say that for you. . . . I should like to be shipmates with you for a trip. D'ye think the skipper of this fine commodious vessel would give us a passage across to Belgium?"

"Holland," Sellick corrected him.

"No. South side the Scheldt is Belgium."

"It's Holland, I tell you. Ask matey, here."

'Kiah, the deep-sea rover, on being question corroborated Sellick.

"Well, Holland or Belgium, it's no odds. Would he give us a passage, think?"

"I dare say. He's giving me one. Ask my mate here again."

"What do you think?" Mainwaring asked 'Kiah.

"Oh, I dunno." 'Kiah was too busy admiring his talented new shipmate to think of anything else.

"What sort is he?" Mainwaring turned again to Sellick, who was idly picking at the strings of his little instrument.

"All right, by the look of him. Bit of a granny, I should think."

"'E's a better man 'n what you are," 'Kiah cut in hotly. "A better man 'n what any of 'ee are, s' there!"

"All right, my dear old chap. Keep cool about it," said Mainwaring. "Nobody doubts it."

"Then what did 'ee say 'e was a granny for? Granny! My——" 'Kiah, excited, used worse language than I had ever discredited him with. "Granny! Better fit you was 'alf the granny 'e is. 'E'd take you three on with one 'and an' knock 'ee silly, all three of 'ee."

"He's big enough, and ugly enough," Sellick said coolly. "Keep your hair on, matey. Nobody's got anything to say against your skipper. He's a better man than I am, past a doubt."

"Ah! that 'e is," said 'Kiah, rather nonplussed by this unexpected agreement; and Sellick striking up another lively tune to end the squabble, I took advantage of the opporunity to retire unheard.

NEXT morning was fine and clear and, being Sunday, the docks were almost deserted. I went straight to the post-office, hoping I might get a letter before it closed at ten o'clock, but nothing further had arrived, and I was on my way back to the boat when I ran right into Ward himself. He was carrying his bag from the

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railway-station and looked tired and done up, having traveled all night, but I was mighty glad to see him, none the less, and he seemed pleased to hear me say so.

"Come to the hotel and have some breakfast with me," he said. "Then you can tell me all about it, and we can talk it over at our leisure. . . . Voogdt deserted, eh? Well, I expect he had his reasons. A man to trust, that, I fancy."

CHAPTER XXXIV

A STATE AFFAIR

AFTER breakfast we lit our pipes and sat in easy chairs by the open window, and I told him the whole story, commencing from the moment when Cheyne had asked us to dinner with Van Noppen. He had let his pipe out before I had finished, but it didn't want that to show he was alive to the importance of it all. He was fairly lost in interest, blinking and staring, filled with curiosity.

"And now you know as much about it as I do," I said, knocking out my pipe on the window-sill. "Can you make head or tail of it? Because I can't."

"Extraordinary," he said. "Most extraordinary."

He got up and began to walk about the room, head down and hands behind his back.

"What do you make of it yourself?" he asked, stopping suddenly to stare at me.

"It beats me—all of it. From the moment I put my finger into Van Noppen's glass and tasted that water, to the last thing last night, it's like a crazy dream. I don't doubt Voogdt sincerely believes——"

"You can take it from me—if my opinion is of any value—that when your friend Voogdt sincerely believes anything, he's got reason for it. Take our own case. This wolframite business had been running for eighteen months, and not a soul along the waterside of two maritime countries had suspected anything. Master Voogdt comes along, knowing nothing whatever of the coasting-business and nothing of chemistry, and yet he gets to the heart of the whole thing inside of six months. A very remarkable man, in my opinion."

"Then do you think he's right in suspecting these Germans to be in secret service?"

"That I can't say. But I do say that if he says so it's an idea worth entertaining. I may be talking utter nonsense in this connection, but of course that bit of coast-line from the Scheldt to the Maas is one of the most vital positions in Europe.

"Half a dozen important rivers—rivers navigable for miles, and tapping the very heart of Central Europe—all flow into the sea among those forty miles of mud-banks. I know nothing of high politics, but you've only to look at a map of Europe to see that much. Only I don't quite understand what a German post can be doing there at Terneuzen. The place is fortified, I know, but only for the protection of the ship-canal."

"Fortified, is it? I never knew that."

"Oh, you're not the stuff spies are made of," said he smiling. "I don't mind telling you I'd been there two or three times before I noticed it myself. Those embankments beyond the village—there's a small garrison and some modern guns. But surely one or two men could examine them without exciting notice better than through this cumbrous trading-station business. I'm still inclined to think they're after the wolframite."

"Cheyne swears they aren't. He says nothing has left the place except barge-loads of explosives."

"I don't know that I should employ Willis Cheyne to go a-spying, any more than either of us two," Ward declared. "No, Voogdt's the man, and we must back him up—at least until we're sure he's mistaken. If it's a national service, we must do our best to help. We'll write him here as instructed and ask whether I shall take this information to the War Office, and I'll go back to London and wait his instructions there. And look here; you'll want money for this business. You must draw on me."

"I've plenty of money."

"You won't have for long. You see, if this business really is a State affair, it will probably be our duty to put a stop to it. We can do that at any moment, without letting loose the dogs of war or any nonsense like that. But if we do, we put a stop to money-making."

"How?"

"SIMPLY make public what we know—that Scheldt mud is worth two hundred pounds a ton. In a week those banks would be crowded with Dutch Government analysts, with a regiment or

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two of infantry and a couple of gunboats patrolling up and down to prevent any more of it being stolen. Under such circumstances I think the explosive factory would be very carefully overhauled, and if there is any spying going on things will be made unpleasant for your friend Van Noppen."

"Then do I understand you to say that Voogdt's in command of the whole show from now on?"

"That's it, exactly. The Axel Trading-Company volunteers for Government service. Voogdt is Commander-in-Chief. You're Admiral of the Fleet, ferrying his confidential agents as he directs. Incidentally I should remove as much wolframite as you can before the smash comes. This declaring it as coprolites will serve for half a dozen more voyages, I dare say, and we can't reckon on having time left us for more than that. I'll stay in London as headquarters-staff, and remit the sinews of war as required. And that's all.

"I must admit I was a little sore about the way your friend penetrated the secrets of our wolframite business, but if he circumvents the agents of an efficient, practical nation like Germany I shall feel I have less reason to be ashamed of my useless precautions. So good luck go with him."

"Amen to that," said I. "For the man's my friend and my mate—one after my own heart. And I'll tell you this: If I lose him over this business, not all the money in the world'll take his place."

WARD had letters to write, he said. So, promising to join him at dinner, I went back aboard meaning to have a sleep. But Sellick was hanging about waiting for me, and at his request I asked him into the cabin.

"Mainwaring and Colley turned up last night," he began. "They want to know if you'll give them a trip across."

"I saw them. They'll stow away for'ard on Monday night before we sail. Who are they?"

"Mainwaring's father was The Mainwaring—the K. C. This fool's been called, but he doesn't like the law. He's a slacker. Messes about poking his fingers into things that don't concern him. He tried to get out to South Africa, but that was no go. He's awfully short-sighted. Then he had a packet of cards printed and bought a hand-camera—pretended he was a war-correspondent."

I remembered what Voogdt had said.

"You were there too, weren't you?"

"Yes. Rotten hole. So was Colley."

"Who's he when he's at home?" I asked.

"He? Oh, he's a man—of sorts. I can't stand Mainwaring—swarmy affable beast. But Colley's a horse of another color. Father was a steeple-jack—factory-chimneys, don't you know. Coade and Colley. Big people in the North. Making big money till the Americans knocked out brick and mortar chimneys with iron pipes in sections. They shut down, and Harry Colley looked out for another job. He's got his points—a sound man on machinery. Started a little motor-works three years ago and did well, I believe. Just chucked that, though. He's been learning flying too. Keen on anything with wheels and works, he is. He's a sulky beast, though. I say, skipper——"

"Well?" I said, for he hesitated.

"What are we playing at, eh?"

"Ask me another," I said. "It's all muddle to me. My orders are to ship you, and I've done it. I'm to take your two friends across to Terneuzen without exciting notice, and I've told them to stow away. They're to leave the ship when we get there. And that's all I know. And now dry up and slip it, unless you've any more interesting yarns to tell me."

He grinned and went on deck. It was all of a piece with the confused, muddled notions I had of the whole affair that I never learned the chap's real name. While he was aboard he did his work well and was neat and tidy, yachtsman-fashion, and when he left he never so much as shook hands or said good-by.

I hadn't any particular desire that he should, as a matter of fact, for his cynical ways weren't mine. Besides, all the time I knew him he was a rich man playing at poverty, and that's a very difficult *rôle* for any man to play without giving offense.

We made a queer ship's-company, take us all the way round, and the only point upon which we showed any signs of agreement was a sincere belief and trust in Voogdt hiding somewhere over there in the Low Countries.

MONDAY morning woke us all to activity. Voogdt evidently considered himself what Ward had called him—Commander-in-Chief—for he handed out his orders like an autocrat. Mine came

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in a letter posted at Bergen-op-Zoom on the previous Saturday and were short and sweet.

All well so far. Ward will join you shortly. Persuade him to act on my instructions posted to him at Erith and Birmingham. Be off Flushing Thursday night, but miss your tide and anchor as close as possible to westward of West Haven Light. Stay two tides and keep passengers below decks out of sight. Hope to join you there.

I went straight to the hotel to tell Ward a letter awaited him at the post-office, but found him at the breakfast-table, already reading it. Carwithen having opened the duplicate had sent him a code-wire telling him to fetch the copy at Erith post-office.

"You've heard, too?" he greeted me. "What are your orders?"

"I'm to persuade you to carry out his instructions, first and foremost."

"Have you any idea what those instructions are?" he asked, looking at me in a puzzled way through his glasses.

"Not a notion."

"Read them, then," said he, and handed me the letter. It was dated as mine, on the Saturday before.

DEAR MR. WARD:

See Jem West and make him tell you everything he knows about the circumstances of my leaving him. The conjectures which I then imparted to him appear correct. I want to impress the importance of this on you as my reason for asking you to do what may appear at first sight a very silly thing.

Briefly, I want you to die on Tuesday next. Will you therefore please publish an announcement of your death in one or two good Birmingham and London papers on Wednesday morning, and ask one of the young ladies to send Cheyne a marked copy, with a letter of regrets. A rather hysterical and frightened letter, please. Then go away for a spell in the country—or, better, to London—and keep out of sight till I tell you to come to life again. This will give considerable pain to your friends and relatives, I fear, but believe me it is necessary. And they'll be more delighted when they discover the report is false. If you think it safe you may take Miss Brand, Miss Lavington and Mr. Carwithen into your confidence, and you must give West your future address—but not a word to a single soul else, mind. This will seem mere idiocy to you, but I assure you that it is vitally important, as I hope to convince you after your resurrection, which I trust will take place within a fortnight at latest.

Yours in great haste,
AUSTIN VOOGDT.

"WHAT do you make of that?" said Ward, as I looked up from the letter. "What's the use of asking me? I've been out of my depth ever since Voogdt left. If 'twas anybody else I should think he'd gone mad. As 'tis—— Shall you do it?"

"I must, I suppose. We all appear pawns in your friend's game. Doesn't your letter throw any light on the business?"

"Not on your dying. There are some definite instructions as to my movements."

I took the letter out of my pocket and handed it to him.

"H'm. This is sane enough," said he, after reading it over. "Thursday night's tide. How long will it take you to get across?"

"That all depends on the wind. It's about a hundred and ten miles. With a light breeze as it is now, say twenty-four hours. If it came on to blow hard easterly we shouldn't get out of the river at all."

"Then hadn't you better get all your ballast out and sail to-night in case of accidents? You'll be clear of the river at all events, and once out in open sea you can hang about until Thursday afternoon."

"That's a good notion. I'll do it. The two stowaways are to come aboard to-night, too, and there'll be no sense in staying here where somebody might see them."

"Good," said he. "Then I'll get back to London at once and arrange for a cab-accident to-night. We may as well put what intelligent coöperation we can into the commandant's instructions. Here's my address."

He wrote it on a sheet of paper—care of some man at Hampstead, an old friend he could trust, he said, and we said good-by and parted. But I had to go back to him again, for I hadn't any orders about the *Luck and Charity*. We had nearly all the alleged coprolites on the wharf when it suddenly occurred to me we couldn't sail light, and I ran up to ask Ward what we should ballast with.

"Oh, ballast," said he carelessly. "Just ordinary ballast. You've brought a genuine cargo for once and no remarks will be made."

"How about when we get back to Terneuzen?"

"We've no time now to cross bridges before we come to them. Voogdt'll see you through at the other end. If I go buying deals or coal here now, it'll mean delay."

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CHAPTER XXXV

A STIFF BLOW

SO WE got twelve or thirteen tons of sand and shingle from the ballast-quay, and, by hustling, the hatch-covers were on before seven o'clock. 'Kiah and Sellick went up-town marketing, and while they were gone the stowaways slipped quietly aboard and disappeared into the forecastle. They ought to have gone into the hold, if I'd only thought of it, for there was no hiding-room for two grown men forward; and just before we cast off 'Kiah came to me much perturbed in mind.

"There's two blooks stowed theirselves away for'ard," he said.

"No!" said I, trying to look surprised. "What do the fools think they're after?"

"I d'no," said 'Kiah. "They'm friends of 'is." He jerked his chin over his shoulder to indicate Sellick. "They was aboard Sat'day night, an' they was talkin' then about 'avin' a trip aboard o' us."

"I'll trip 'em!" I said. "Don't you scare 'em out of it, 'Kiah. We'll give 'em a doing. They won't stow aboard this craft again, I'll bet."

"Aw right," said he, impassively as ever, and set bout hauling warps aboard, so that we got away without further remark.

The low Essex shore was out of sight and we were nearing the Kentish Knock next morning when the pair discovered themselves. Sellick had just come to the wheel to let me go to breakfast and we'd had a little passage of arms about the course.

"East-nor'east," he repeated after me. "I say, skipper, Flushing light lays south of east from the Girdler, or I'm mistaken."

"Mind your own business," I said. "Steer the course I give you."

"Righto," said he, the magic of secret service evidently working in his mind. "Beg pardon."

"Since you've had the manners to beg pardon, I don't mind telling you we ain't due off Flushing till Thursday night. And then we've got to miss the flood at seven-thirty and anchor close in. But you bear in mind I'm skipper here and I know my business. I didn't ship you to teach me."

"Thursday night," said he. "That's interesting. Five men aboard for three days, and 'Kiah's marketed for three men for one day."

"Mind your own business," I said again angrily, for I hadn't thought of that, and I could see short commons for somebody sticking out a mile.

"East-nor'east," he murmured under his breath, staring at the compass like a wooden image, and I had to seek some other object to blow off steam upon.

As luck would have it, Mainwaring chose just that moment to make his appearance on deck, and I called him aft, asked him his business aboard, and then let him have it good. It was no use trying to rile him, though. Like the others he'd got this secret-service bee in his bonnet, and if I'd had him chucked overboard he would have sunk with a finger at his nose, winking at me as much as to say we were all in the know together.

When I'd done slanging him, much to 'Kiah's edification, I asked if he'd brought any food on board.

"No, sir," he said affably. "But I have a friend in that little cabin and perhaps he——"

"A friend!" I roared. "How many more of you? What is your little game anyway? There's another swab stowed away for'ard, 'Kiah. Fetch him up."

'KIAH produced Colley, and his appearance took a little weight off my mind. He was turning green already, and I saw we needn't worry about his food for the next twenty-four hours. I gave him a dressing-down calculated to depress him still further, and then set the pair of them to washing out the fo'castle under 'Kiah's superintendence.

After breakfast I felt better and sat down by the wheel to smoke and watch Colley hauling buckets of water aboard and lowering them down the fo'castle-ladder to his comrade in distress. Stealing a look at Sellick, I saw that he appeared very pleased with himself.

"What's the joke?" I asked him.

"Looks to me as if it was coming on fresh out of the nor'east," said he.

"Perhaps you won't find it such a joke, if it does."

"Oh, I'm all right," he said. "I'm always seasick when I smell salt water, but it's over in ten minutes. I left my supper in London river last night. Now it can blow all it likes, for me. It's those two I'm tickled at. I owe them both a turn or two. Harry

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Colley took twenty-two quid odd off me at poker coming home from the Cape. Besides, more grub for us, skipper. Two days on one day's tucker won't hurt anybody. But two extra men and two extra days are too much of a good thing. That's cutting it too fine altogether."

I had one or two tins of meat in the cabin in case of emergencies but, as he said, five men for three days on the rations of three men for one day was too near a thing altogether, and I saw the emergency-stores wouldn't last long.

However, he was quite right about its coming on to blow. The northeast horizon was hard and clear against a light sky, and by midday the wind had freshened and was knocking up a lumpy sea. The two passengers declined dinner and retired to their bunks, where they stayed, only showing themselves on deck once or twice until Thursday afternoon. So they were no expense or bother to anybody.

Sellick proved handy and useful, and he, 'Kiah and myself took trick and trick about for the next four and twenty hours. The wind being dead against us, we just lay as close to it as we could, quartering the North Sea at our ease, and gaining a few useful miles to windward with each tack.

The *Luck and Charity* being the good boat she was, we stood at the wheel dry-shod, but beating to windward isn't the most comfortable business in the world, and once or twice, when she bashed her bows into biggish seas, I felt sorry for the two landsmen lying very sick below. We just jogged across, bang, bang, banging, to and fro—from the Galloper to the Rabs Bank; back to the outer Gabbard; back again to the Schar, only making a mile or two to windward on every forty-mile tack, but not losing anything. It wasn't exciting, but we were obeying instructions, and anyhow there's always a certain amount of satisfaction in knowing somebody else is worse off than you are. So the passengers were good for something, if only to keep our spirits up.

We picked up Lowestoft light early on Thursday morning and went about for the last time. Having all day—fifteen hours—in which to do a short hundred miles we didn't hurry. The wind had eased a bit, and the waves no longer had feathery tops to them, but there was a lump of a sea all the same. We sidled across it, crab-fashion, till about four in the afternoon and then I thought it was about time to think of home.

We were then about thirty miles north of the Scheldtmouth lightships, the *Wandelaar* and *Weilingen*, so after an early tea we wore ship and ran for it on a course nearly parallel with the Dutch coast, so as to keep clear of the East Scheldt banks. We timed it nicely, running right under the lee of the Walcheren sand-hills in slack water, and met the first of the strong ebb not a quarter of a mile from Flushing harbor.

The easier motion of running had revived the two passengers a bit, and they wanted to come on deck. But, bearing in mind Voogdt's instructions, I ordered them to keep below, much to their discontent. It wasn't any pleasure-trip for them from first to last. The ebb drifted us back perhaps five hundred yards before we got the anchor overside, so that we lay a good half-mile from the harbor-mouth, for which I wasn't sorry, because a quarter-mile is almost too close to escape notice from the shore, and, besides, our drifting back made the anchoring look a sensible thing to do. Association with Voogdt was beginning to teach me that it's well to have an ostensible sham reason for doing anything besides your own real one.

A BIG fleet of Scheldt shrimpers came out of harbor on the first of the ebb, and by the time the last of them had passed us it was dusk and 'Kiah was hauling up our riding-light on the forestay. He had hardly made it fast when we were hailed by a small boat nearing us, and asked our name and business.

"*Luck and Charity*, English ketch, Erith to Terneuzen, in ballast," I sang out.

"And God bless her, say I!" Voogdt's voice came cheerfully out of the dusk, and I saw him sitting in the stern of the approaching boat, some Dutch amphibian at the oars. Coming alongside he slapped the side of our bows as one slaps a favorite horse in a stable.

"Good old wooden packet," said he, scrambling aboard. "And good old wooden-headed skipper. Jem West, I'm glad to see you again."

"You ain't the only one," I said. "My aunt! Haven't I been in a sweat about you, just! Where've you been?"

"That'll keep," said he. "Have you brought the passengers?"

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"Yes. I reported to Antwerp, as you told me."

"I haven't been there since. Where are they?"

"In the fo'castle."

"Send 'em aft, will you? They can go ashore here—in that boat alongside. But I want a word with 'em first. How've they been?"

"Seasick," I told him.

"All three?"

"No. Sellick's been useful."

"Who's Sellick?"

"The chap who shipped as mate. That's what he chooses to call himself—Dick Sellick. I notice the others call him Frank."

"What odds? A rose by any other name—— You say he's useful. Let him call himself what he likes. That you, 'Kiah?"

"Ah!" said 'Kiah, very pleased. "Yu got away from they Dutch coppers then, Mr. Vute?"

"A sure thing I did, my son. I'll do as much for you next time. Just turn out those two seasick coves and send 'em aft to the cabin, will you?"

We went below together and a moment or two later the others joined us. They were in a bad way, both of them, for seasickness is no joke; but they were evidently glad to see Voogdt again.

"Hello, cockies," said he, shaking hands. "You've had a bit of a doing, the skipper tells me. Cheer up! You're going ashore right now."

"Thank Pete!" said Colley with feeling.

"That's right. A very proper frame of mind. Smarten yourselves up a bit, go ashore and take the train for Antwerp. When you get there call at the George Hotel—it's near the docks, an English house—and fetch a letter addressed to me in the name of V. Austin. That's right?" he asked me.

"Quite right."

"Then cross the river to the Waesland station, go to Terneuzen and put up at the hotel by the locks. We shall be there before you, but remember you don't know us, and you never saw this *Luck and Charity* before in your lives."

"I wish I never had," said Colley as fervently as before.

"Well, you haven't. Get that firmly fixed in your heads. And you never saw me or West or any of us before. You'd better be English tourists, or artists or any old thing you like. But you take no interest whatever in shipping. Savvy that? All you do is to loaf about there and wait instructions. And now be off. You've time to get some grub ashore—I expect you're beginning to feel hungry, eh?—and catch the boat-train at midnight. Roosendaal's the junction for Antwerp. Don't forget to call for my letter."

"What are we to do with it?"

"Anything in it beyond the report?" Voogdt asked me.

"No."

"Then burn it. It's of no importance; but we mustn't leave things lying about, no matter how harmless they are."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TRAIL OF THE RED SWALLOWTAIL

THE two were overside with their belongings inside of ten minutes, Voogdt chatting with Sellick in the meanwhile. When the boat had disappeared in the darkness, heading for the pier-heads, he came below with me again, and sat himself down, warming his hands. Opening the top of the stove he stared into the glowing fire.

"It's good to be home again and warm," said he. "I've been in some cold shops."

"Out with it," said I. "Tell us all about it. What have you discovered?"

"Precious little when you come to reckon it all up. And yet—I've got two or three facts. Facts that certainly don't fit in with my theories about secret service though."

"What are they?"

"Not so fast. I think the best thing to do will be to tell you the whole yarn from the start—from the time 'Kiah put me ashore."

"At Hoogplaat."

"WHEN he left me—— Did you know he wanted to lend me a couple of quid when I landed? No? He did, then. Good old 'Kiah! . . . Well, having refused the loan, much to his disgust, I got away from the waterside as fast as I could. I got to Ghent early next morning. What I was after was to trace those German powder-barges, if possible. Cheyne said they had all gone up river, but I don't put a lot of reliance on that gentleman, and thought I'd make a few inquiries on my

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own. However, none had come to Ghent. Three hours hanging about the dock-offices convinced me of that.

"So I took the evening train to Antwerp and started the same search there. At first it looked like a long job, which is why I told you to write me there. But in the evening I met a chap in the George Hotel, water-clerk to a firm of brokers, who knew the place and business like the back of his hand. I made up to him, pretty-mannered as you please, stood him a few drinks and he introduced me to a man in the Customs. More drinks; more palm-oil; and before 1 A.M. I'd checked every entry of imported explosives that had entered the port in the last twelve months. Not one of them was from Terneuzen.

"I got a map and pondered over it. Then I saw the light.

"All the tangle of waterways seemed to fall into order before my eyes, just as a child's puzzle-maze becomes clear in a moment when a pencil-line is drawn through its proper path to the center. Nearly all the canals leading toward the frontier seemed to converge at Tiel and to Tiel I went, first train. All as before: Low pubs, free drinks, and the information I wanted, before 10 A.M. A powder-barge had passed through there on Saturday—bound for Arnhem, my informant thought, though he wasn't sure about that. On to Arnhem; to find the barge had left that same morning, bound down the Iissel for Zwolle, on her way to Delfzyl.

"So off I went in chase, and actually saw her from the train, crawling along behind two stuggy Flemish tow-horses. It was at a lonely part of the canal, and not only was the chap at the wheel smoking, but her cabin stovepipe was smoking too. And the red swallowtail flying overhead all the time! How's that?"

"I'm glad I wasn't aboard her."

"So I thought at the time. Not that I ever imagined it was powder they were carrying, all the same. Well, this was just before reaching Zutphen. I whipped out my map, left the train at Zutphen and took another for the frontier. I was going by guesswork, I grant you, but it happened to be right.

"Next morning I went to Ihrhove, the junction for the West Friesland line, and thence to Weener, where the railway crosses the Ems below its junction with the Bourthanger Canal. This was Tuesday morning, and I hadn't been there six hours before a barge passed under the railway bridge, red swallowtail and all, bound for—where d'ye think?"

"Delfzyl?"

"Wrong again. Emden." He looked triumphant. "She'd changed her mind about her port of destination while passing through those morasses. What d'ye think of that?"

"I don't see anything in it."

"I do, then. This company, with alleged headquarters at Delfzyl in Holland, is sending a steady stream of barges by devious routes into Germany, loaded with wolframite. Think of the tons and tons they're sending. They whack our primitive methods, hands down. Here are we, messing about-Channel, with long voyages and short voyages delayed by all sorts of weather, while they're sending a steady procession—forty tons at a time—by safe and certain routes.

"Explosives be blowed! But isn't it a noble notion? Not a soul dares tamper with their carboys, or retorts, or whatever they are. We must do the same business, Jem. I'll put it before Ward next trip, and we must lay in rope-screens and all the rest of the stage-properties A grand idea! Why, we can go on for years. I see myself a millionaire yet."

"Then you haven't been to Terneuzen at all?"

"What need, man? I've found out the essentials of the business. We know they're on the same lay as we are, and we know where they're shipping their goods. What more do you want?"

"Look here," I said. "I grant your head's worth ten of mine, but I'd like to point out one thing to you. You haven't discovered what you set out to do, and that's the meaning of that road-making at midnight."

"True," said he. "But that can soon be done now we know what they're at. My conjectures were all wrong—about the German secret-service business, I mean. They're just the same sort of thieves as we are."

"Have it so," I said. "I can't contradict you. Now what are the next orders? What about Ward's death?"

His face fell.

"I'd forgotten all about it. A pretty fool I shall look. However, it's done now, I

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suppose, and it won't do any harm for a day or two. It'll be rather interesting to see how Cheyne takes the news. Bet you what you like he proposes some new scheme of robbery on the strength of it."

WE GOT up anchor just after midnight and had a quick journey dodging before the breeze up the narrow channels, and anchored again off Terneuzen at three o'clock on Friday morning. There was a light in the office, and in answer to our hail Cheyne came out and called to us to send a boat ashore. 'Kiah and Sellick had just turned in for a few hours' sleep, so I took the dingey ashore myself, and he came sliding and squattering down over the mud-banks to meet it.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked, when he got down into the cabin, muddied half way to his knees.

"What news?"

"When did you sail?"

"Monday night."

"You've been a long time coming."

"Head-winds. And we missed our tide at Flushing. What's the news?"

"Leonard Ward's dead."

"Never!" We chorused astonishment. "What did he die of?"

"Cab-accident in Duncannon Street—by Charing Cross. I haven't any particulars yet, but I've had a newspaper and a letter from Miss Brand. They're scared to death, those girls."

"And what's to do now?" I asked. "Who's to take over his work?"

"Ah! Well you may ask. I can't do it and be here too, can I? I don't suppose either of you two can be spared—even if you knew the business. I don't know what you think, but I don't fancy trusting Carwithen altogether. Eh?"

"What do you suggest?" Voogdt said quietly. "Haven't you got a proposal ready?"

"Well—— Look here, you two, what I say goes no farther, does it? Well, then, I don't mind owning that Van Noppen has made me an offer on the quiet to buy us out."

"What's the figure?"

"I bluffed him, as I thought. Said I wouldn't sell out under a hundred thousand. And if you'll believe me he rose to it. Thirty-three thousand quid apiece for the three of us. Isn't that very near enough?"

"What about the other partners?" said Voogdt doubtfully.

"Well—what about 'em? They won't make trouble. They're too badly scared over Leonard's death. Besides, what do women know of business? And they've got enough already—more than enough."

It was Voogdt's promptness saved the beast. The point of Cheyne's chin wasn't two feet from my face, and if he'd spoken half a dozen words more I should have broken his lying jaw. As it was, Voogdt leant over between us and took him by the buttonhole.

"This is talking," he said in tones of admiration. "This is straight talk. Now you go on deck, Cheyne, just for ten minutes, and we'll give you your answer."

The sweep went like a lamb, and Voogdt turned to me.

"Put your hands in your pockets and keep 'em there," he said. "If I see your knuckles go white like that again, I'll fling the lamp at you, sure's my name's Voogdt. You clumsy ass, you'll muck the whole show!"

"Muck's a good word," I said, choking. "And I'm going to dirty my fingers on that lump of filth!"

"No, you aren't—not yet, anyhow. Do for Heaven's sake bottle yourself up for an hour. I'm going to get him down again and arrange details. You sit tight there, and don't you open your mouth, except to say 'Yes' or 'No.' "

HE CALLED Cheyne down again.

"Look here," he said. "As man to man, is that hundred thousand the outside figure?"

"On my honor it is."

Of all things, he chose to swear by his honor!

"How much are you to get as bonus if you bring off the deal?"

"Oh, well, that's only a commission—that's fair business."

"I never said it wasn't. What's the total figure?"

"I was to have ten per cent. commission—ten thousand quid. On my word of honor, Voogdt, old chap, that's the last penny of it."

"We want half that, just to make even money. Thirty-five thousand apiece for us and forty thousand for you. Will that do?"

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Cheyne was evidently very much relieved at our moderation.

"That isn't out of the way," he said.

"Then tell Van Noppen we'll meet him to discuss the matter in our office this evening at half-past nine. Don't say we accept. We may screw a little more out of him. Agreed? Good enough. Now you slip ashore again and get to bed. We shall be alongside emptying our hold before eight."

"What have you brought?"

Voogdt looked at me, nonplussed for once.

"Ballast," I said.

It was the only word I spoke during the interview, and I had to lick my lips twice before I could get that out, for I was shaking all over with rage, and it was all I could do to obey Voogdt's orders and sit still.

It was Voogdt put him ashore—he wouldn't trust me alone with him—and when he returned he found me walking up and down the deck, cursing under my breath.

"Come below," said he.

"I can't stand the cabin," I said, "since that Thing's been down there."

"Don't talk rot. This sort of high-falutin isn't business."

"Is it business to rob women?"

"'Tain't business to stay on deck cursing early of a cold morning when you might be down below scheming to get to windward of the swine. Don't you see we're in a fix? If we don't keep in with Cheyne, he busts the show. Our only chance is to get him on our side and stick out for a higher price than Van Noppen'll pay. Come below and I'll persuade you."

"I won't come below and I won't be persuaded," I said. "I feel as if I'd been rolling in muck, and I'll stay up here in fresh air for a bit."

"All right. Be a fool," said he shortly, and went below.

As for me, I stayed on deck till daylight, disgusted with everything. That beast, that liar, that robber of women, was Pamela Brand's cousin!

The only consolation was that even she knew something more of him now than she used to do, and there wasn't much fear of the engagement I'd heard talked about. But it was bad enough that they should be blood-relations, without that.

CHAPTER XXXVII

I LONG TO PUNCH CHEYNE'S NOSE

THE night was over already, really. There was the waking-feel in the air that comes before the dawn. Arcturus was setting, the Crown nearing the horizon, and to eastward over Europe the marshy sky-line was black and well defined, the rising stars pale against a strip of gray. I walked up and down, and the more I walked the more my anger grew.

When the clean sky and the first fresh wind of morning told me again what I knew very well before, that Pamela Brand was the only girl in the world for me, I had only to glance ashore to be reminded that Cheyne had once dared to think she was his for the asking.

That was the sting of it all; that was what made my anger venomous. He was a rogue—a blackguard—no names could be too bad for him in any case. But his crowning offense, far worse than cheating or theft, was that he had dared so much as to look at his cousin. Love and hate warred in me. Putting the love in the background of my mind, I promised the rising sun that I would square accounts with Cheyne before it set again.

It came up round and clear, turning marshes and river to gold, and then hid again behind a bank of cloud to make its toilet for a fine bright day. Sellick was first on deck, looking about him curiously, and I told him to rouse 'Kiah out while I waked Voogdt to help get alongside the wharf. Voogdt and Sellick in the dingey towed the *Luck and Charity* a couple of hundred yards and then took the ends of our warps ashore, so that we were tied up within half an hour, and then all hands knocked off for breakfast.

Voogdt gave me a sharp talking-to over the table; but I was tired and sulky, and wouldn't promise anything, until from slanging me he got to asking as a favor that I would give him a fortnight to prepare the business for a shock.

"We've been good pals, Jem," he said. "Don't go and spoil my plans now. For Heaven's sake keep your hands off Cheyne for the present, and I promise you, as soon as we can possibly manage it, I'll give you the word to go for him, and you can bash him into tripe then, if you want to. But

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not now. After all my trouble this last week or two you surely aren't going to wreck the show?"

"I'm going to give him a hammering," I repeated.

"He deserves it. No man better. But not now. See here, if we can't get out of it any other way I'll get Ward's permission to accept this offer. Six into a hundred gives us over sixteen thousand a share—eight thousand each for you and myself. That's none so bad. If Ward consents we'll take that, and you can have a scrap with Cheyne thrown in as bonus on your share. Will that do?"

"Anything'll do, so that I get my chance at him. That's all I want—to feel his face against my knuckles. I don't want the money."

"Well, I do. Let me have what I want and you can do what you like with Cheyne. It seems a pity to chuck away a hundred thousand quid, doesn't it, just because you won't postpone your rough-and-tumble for a week or so? You must, old man. See here, if you upset things now you're robbing our partners of sixteen thousand pounds apiece. Isn't that so?"

"All right," I said sullenly. "I'll hold off for a fortnight but, mind you, that's the whole extent of it. A fortnight from now, whether your arrangements are made or not, I take Master Cheyne by the ear and we'll see who's the best man."

"There's a lot of doubt about that. But promise you won't touch him or make trouble before then."

"Very well. I promise."

"That's better," said he, much relieved. "And now let's get this ballast out and load—load deep for once. No more pretense at ballast. This is coprolites, henceforth. A good notion, that of yours, Jem."

"Don't you come carneying round me," I said. "You've heard my last word. I give you one fortnight to make your arrangements and then——"

"All right. All right," said he. "Don't make a song about it. I've got your promise to lie low for a fortnight, remember. Don't forget it means sixteen thousand pounds in Miss Brand's pocket."

"And Miss Lavington's," I snapped at him.

"Quite right. And Carwithen's, and Ward's. And eight thousand in mine and yours. Now come on deck and work some of your bad temper out of you."

WE SLUNG the ballast straight over the skeleton-wharf out on the mud, an absence of precaution showing more clearly than anything else could have done that the end of our trading-operations was in sight. The hold was almost empty by low water and we were able to get a few tubs of mud aboard before the rising tide stopped our work.

Cheyne didn't come near us all day. He lay abed late, not coming out of the office until midday. Then he only waved a hand and set out for Terneuzen—for lunch, I suppose. When we knocked off at about half-past two, Voogdt changed into clean clothes and followed him. He got back about five.

"Mainwaring and Colley are there," he announced when we sat down to tea. "Mainwaring's an English tourist of weak intellect and Colley's his attendant. They're coming down this way for a walk about dusk."

"Are they coming aboard?"

I was feeling much better after a day's steady work, for there's nothing like hard exercise for the temper.

"Coming aboard? No fear. They're going down the embankment toward Van Noppen's show. I'm going for a walk, too. You and Sellick will stay here and keep a sharp lookout."

He went off at about half-past six, after a chat with Sellick, scrambled down the embankment, pipe in mouth, and set off inland, strolling at an easy pace. Sunset was at seven, and just as the great red ball touched the western marshy sky-line I saw Mainwaring and Colley coming down the path from the town. Mainwaring was walking jerkily as if he were on tiptoe, while Colley slouched along a pace in his rear, his hands in his pockets. They were first-rate at acting a part, for if Voogdt hadn't told me what they were playing at, I should have put them down as somebody a bit dotty and his keeper. As they passed the wharf Mainwaring stopped and pointed at us.

"See the little ship, John," he said sort of silly-interested.

"Ah!" said Colley sulkily.

He spoke exactly as a bored attendant on a madman would speak, and after Mainwaring had twaddled some more about the little ship they went on down the banks as before.

I whipped below and watched them

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through the glasses until it got too dark to see what they were at, and then I went on deck again. The last I saw of them they had passed the German sheds and were walking farther down the embankment. When I got on deck I found Sellick going up the gangplank.

"Here, where are you going?" I asked.

"Ashore. Just a stroll to stretch my legs. No objection, is there? I'm obeying orders."

"All right," I said, and he went up the wharf, disappeared behind the office, and I saw no more of him.

I WALKED up and down for a bit, had a chat with 'Kiah on the fo'castle-head and then, wondering what time it was, peeped down into the cabin. Our clock said half-past eight, and it was getting very dark. I was just beginning to wonder whether Mainwaring and Colley had lost their way when I heard two men walking up the embankment from the direction in which they had gone.

Having nothing else to do I went ashore to the end of the wharf to see them pass, but they were only two laborers, apparently on their way home to Terneuzen, instead of the two men I had expected. They lingered by our sheds for a moment and then went on, saying good night to me in Dutch as they passed.

They couldn't have been gone five minutes, and I was just sitting down upon a bollard to rest, when Colley came running up the embankment at top speed. He had kept to the grassy edges of the path and was on me almost before I heard him.

"Anything wrong?" I asked, startled.

"No. Got a pair of pliers or stout shears aboard? Anything that'll cut wire? Yes? Run, quick."

I slipped aboard and brought him a knife I kept in the cabin for odd jobs, which had a pair of wire nippers on it.

"Will this do?" I asked.

He looked at it contemptuously.

"It must, if you've nothing better. Anybody passed here? Two men? That's right. Did they hang about the place at all? Yes? Good. Don't let anybody go near there—near the sheds—till we come back."

He ran off as silently as he had come, leaving me to wonder what was going on.

As I sat I was facing our sheds, the office immediately opposite me, two stores on the left and one larger on the right. Behind, tied alongside the wharf, was the *Luck and Charity*, her bows toward the river and her stern about thirty feet from where I sat. The path along the embankment was wider here, worn by traffic to a good broad road, narrowing off again to left and right in the directions of Terneuzen and the German sheds.

The night was fine, but clouds hid the stars and it was very dark, so that it was as much as I could do to make out the shape of the gable-end over the office. From the top of the embankment the marshy horizon all round lay low and dark, blurred a little with the low mists lying on the pastures.

It was a cheerless place by night, low-lying, damp and cold; the only lights visible were one or two twinkles from the houses by Terneuzen lock and a cheery glow from our fo'castle-hatch, shining up through the faint haze that lay over the water. I was just on the point of going down there for warmth and 'Kiah's company when Sellick came from behind the sheds, crossed the road and sat down beside me on the bollard.

"Where've you been?" I asked.

"Just over there." He spoke in a whisper, nodding toward the office. "Squatting on the grass behind that hut. Watching you, for one thing."

"Colley's just been here. He says we're not to go near the sheds."

"I heard him. No fear of my going, anyhow."

"Did you see those two men pass?"

"I did. Shut up, skipper. Listen."

We listened with all our ears, but could hear nothing except the light breeze sighing in the grass, and 'Kiah whistling some melancholy strain down in the fo'castle behind us. Once Sellick looked round over his shoulder with a jerk, and I thought he was going to call to 'Kiah to be quiet, but apparently he changed his mind and we sat on in silence.

SUDDENLY I remembered the appointment with Van Noppen in our office at nine-thirty, and was thinking it was time some of the others put in an appearance when Voogdt came quickly and quietly across the road.

"Time?" he said sharply, in a low voice.

Sellick had a watch and struck a match.

"Ten to nine," he said.

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"Good. We're on time, then. Anything to report, Frank?"

"One of those two chaps stopped by the living-shed. Messing about the bottom of the wall, as far as I could see."

"Whereabouts?"

"Far side. Near the middle of the shed."

"Right. Clear out, you two. Get aboard. Your work's done. I'm on duty here."

"Colley says no one is to go near the sheds," I put in.

"That's all right, Jem. I know. Ah! Here they are. I want you, Harry. Disappear, Mainwaring. Take charge of this, Frankie."

He handed Sellick what looked to me like a long limp riding-switch, and slipped across the road again, Colley at his heels.

Sellick strolled out along the wharf toward our gangplank, and I was turning to follow him when something plucked at my trousers-leg. Stooping, startled, to see what it was I found my head close to Mainwaring's upturned face. He was lying prone upon the grass.

"Lie down here, skipper," he said. "Frankie'll look after the ship for you. Stay and see the fun. Take cover behind the bollard."

As I lay down beside him a match was struck behind the office and in less than a minute the other two came across the road, walking slowly and carefully, Voogdt with a bundle clasped in his arms.

"Careful; don't jolt it, Austin!" Colley's voice sounded very earnest. "Put it down here on the grass. Gently, now."

"Not too close to my head," Mainwaring said plaintively.

Neither of them as much as noticed him. "Let's have a light again. Matches are safe enough," Colley said.

He was kneeling by the bundle, feeling it all over with his hands. Voogdt struck a match and by its flickering light I saw it was of sail-cloth, about as big as a man's head, tied carelessly enough with a piece of stout line.

The match went out, but after more fumbling in the dark Colley seemed to get the bundle open.

"Another match," he demanded.

The sail-cloth now lay flat, and standing on it was a common kitchen saucepan, its handle broken off short, filled with coarse yellow crystals. Like brown sugar, only that the crystals were larger.

"My hat!" Colley whispered, in awed tones.

"What is it?" Voogdt asked.

"Picric acid, by the look of it."

He picked out two crystals rather larger than peas and put them by on the bollard.

"Throw away that match and bear a hand, Austin. Take it by handfuls at a time, and spread it out on the mud below there. Don't throw it. Walk down and spread it on the mud by hand."

When the saucepan was empty he took it farther down the embankment and threw it into a pasture field, and just as he rejoined us I heard a step I knew approaching down the embankment.

"There's Cheyne coming," I said.

At the words our two men disappeared noiselessly into the darkness. I never saw where or how they went. Mainwaring, beside me, gave one wriggle backward and I suppose slid down over the bank. By the time I was on my feet again Colley had gone, too, and Voogdt and myself were alone.

"THAT you, Cheyne?" Voogdt called.

"That's me. Am I late? Van Noppen turned up yet?"

"Not yet."

"That's all right, then. I'll open the office. We may as well wait inside as out here."

His shadowy form approached the office door and I heard his latch-key in the lock.

"Is it all clear for him to go in?" I asked in a whisper.

"All clear. Got the hang of things yet?"

"An attempt to blow up the shed?"

"That's about it."

"Are you sure there isn't any explosive stuff left there?"

"No odds if there is. We've cut their wire. Pretty road-making, eh? Now I'll go in to Cheyne. You stay here and keep an eye open for Van Noppen."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

PICRIC ACID, THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT AND CHEYNE'S NOSE

THE German turned up punctually to time, and we went into the shed together, passing straight through the narrow outer office into Cheyne's living-room.

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I'd been there several times before, without taking much notice of the place, but now with my nerves strung and alert every detail leaped to my eye. The frowzy bed in the far corner; the writing-table by the window; the stove bricked into one angle, with a cheap alarm-clock ticking noisily on the narrow mantel-shelf—I can see them now as clearly as if in a photograph. In the middle of the room was a table with a green baize cover, and against the partition hung a row of coats and oilskins.

Everything was neglected, dusty and uncomfortable. Kept tidy, the place would have made decent quarters enough for a single man; but how Cheyne, a sailor, could have ever lived in such a litter beat me.

It's queer how little things affect one. Knowing Cheyne to be a rogue and hating him like poison, I yet felt more ashamed at the moment of his untidy house than of his rascality. Remembering the neatness of Van Noppen's room—the room we had burgled—I felt it disgraceful that he should see our headquarters in such a state.

CHEYNE was sitting at the table as we entered, the inevitable bottle and siphon before him, and Voogdt sprawled at ease upon his unmade bed. Van Noppen sat down, refusing Cheyne's invitation to drink, and I stood leaning against the office partition behind him. I wouldn't sit in Cheyne's quarters.

Behind me, to my right, was the door; opposite, in the far right-hand corner, the fireplace. Opposite to that again in the far left-hand corner stood the bed, and immediately on my left was the wash-stand, set squarely in the corner at its foot, the coats and oilskins hanging on the wall beside it. The window was between the fireplace and the bed, and Cheyne sat with his back to it, facing Van Noppen, the lamp standing on the table between them.

I stood behind the German's back, while Voogdt, lying on the bed, well back from the light, commanded a view of the whole room, and of all our three faces, Cheyne in profile, Van Noppen three-quarter face, and me full face. Also he had the best view of the door, which was diagonally opposite from the corner in which he lay. As for me, I could see everything in the room except Van Noppen's face, which was turned away from me, and the door, which was behind my right shoulder.

After a bit of palavering round the subject, Cheyne took the conversation in charge and told Van Noppen he had reported the offer to us, and that we were prepared to come to terms if possible. Van Noppen looking round over his shoulder at me, as though he wanted me to corroborate Cheyne, I told him at once that I had nothing to say in the matter.

"There's my partner," I said, nodding at Voogdt. "He speaks for me. I'm only here to listen, so it's no good asking me questions. What he says, I'll stand to."

And after that I had nothing more to say.

As far as I remember, Voogdt, after a lot of haggling, demanded a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Van Noppen didn't definitely refuse him. He said he wasn't empowered to agree to so much, but that he would consult his principals. That should have ended the matter for the present, but Voogdt started a long roundabout catechism that I couldn't follow at all.

At first I thought he was trying to find out the names of Van Noppen's employers, but after a few questions about them he drifted purposelessly off into a series of questions that didn't seem to me to have any bearing on the matter. How did Van Noppen intend to pay us? What was the present rate of exchange—marks for pounds sterling? Were the Delfzyl Company prepared to make us an additional offer for the *Luck and Charity?* Silly questions like that. And several times he repeated himself, so that even Cheyne at last had to call him to order and tell him he was wasting time.

As for Van Noppen, he began to fidget under the cross-questioning, and at ten past ten got up and announced that he must be going, and just as he rose I heard somebody move in the outer office behind me. He would pass on our demands to his employers, he said, and he thought he might get them to spring the extra money.

With that he turned to the door and, the conversation being over, Cheyne leaned back in his chair. His movement let the lamplight fall on Voogdt's face behind him, and it startled me. He, the man whose sleepy, silly questions had bored us all, was about as sleepy as a crouching cat. Behind his half closed-eyelids the lamplight shone on the keenest pair of watching eyes I have ever seen.

Seeing something was in the wind, I

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glanced at Van Noppen's face as he stretched a hand to the door. It was deadly pale and I saw that he was breathing short and quick.

"Half a minute," Voogdt drawled. "Half a minute, Mr. Van Noppen. I've one or two more questions."

"To-morrow," the man said, and something clicked in his throat as he said it.

"You've left your hat," Voogdt said, sitting upright on the bed. "There, on the table. What's your hurry?"

VAN NOPPEN glanced at the clock and his face went the color of ash. Taking no notice of Voogdt or of the hat he jerked the door open—and fell slap into the arms of Mainwaring and Colley. Entering, they pushed him back into the room.

"*Himmel!*" he said under his breath. He was struggling to pass them, but Mainwaring, beaming, held him fast, while Colley shut the door and leaned against it.

"What's the hurry, my dear sir?" Mainwaring asked.

Van Noppen's chin went up as if he were choking. He couldn't answer. Voogdt's drawl came from the corner again.

"The gentleman's pressed for time," he said cruelly. "Two questions, Van Noppen, and then you shall go home to by-by. Are your employers a private firm or the German Government?"

He was choking, frantic with terror, and when he got his answer out it was in German. A private firm, he swore.

"How called?" Voogdt snapped out the question like an order.

"Nobel's," he said, and with one jerk dragged himself free of Mainwaring's hold and jumped at the door. Colley caught him. Mainwaring was on him in the same moment. There was a short struggle, and they laid him, gently enough, on the floor. He had fainted in their arms.

Voogdt stood over him as he lay.

"Poor fool!" he said. "I wouldn't go through his last ten minutes for minted gold. Put him on the bed and give him some brandy, Cheyne."

"What's it all about?" Cheyne asked angrily. "Who the devil are these chaps?"

"Friends of mine. You see, Mr. Van Noppen had arranged an accidental explosion for our benefit. For some time past he has been repairing the ruts in the road down the embankment, and as he filled them in he laid an insulated wire along one of 'em.

"This evening one of his men planted a packet of picric acid under this house, and judging from the time he fainted I guess it was to have been touched off at ten-fifteen. I expect his men have been waiting this last half an hour to run down and tear up any ends of insulated wire left showing. It would then have been just an unexplained accident. At all events neither you, myself nor West here would have had any explanation to offer for certain."

"How did you find it out?" I asked.

"I went down there this evening with these two—" he indicated Mainwaring and Colley—"as skirmishers. Scratched up a bit of rut that had been filled in and found the wire. You remember seeing it in Van Noppen's room? So I cut out a four-foot section, replaced the stones I'd dug up and then came here and removed the picric acid as you saw. The two men who brought it passed us on their way here. That's all."

"The swine!" roared Cheyne. "What about his offer to buy us out?"

"Ah! I'm afraid that wasn't a *bona-fide* offer. Our business is finished, Cheyne. Full reports of the wolframite deposits will be in all the papers the day after to-morrow."

"Is that so?" I asked.

"Yes. Nobel's, he said. Didn't you hear him? Subsidized by Government. No more wolframite goes to Germany disguised as explosives."

"It *is* an explosive," Colley cut in.

"Eh?"

"Tungsten acid, of course. Didn't you know that? In its crystallized form it's used for making kranzite, the new German army-explosive. Is there any wolframite hereabouts?"

"Just a little. The ground you're standing on is mostly tungsten dioxid. Kranzite, eh? And Nobel's in it. I was right, after all."

We were all silent for a minute, standing round the bed, watching Van Noppen lying so still and quiet. Gradually the sense of what it all meant was soaking into Cheyne's brain, for he turned to Voogdt with a question.

"How will it get into the papers? Can't we hush it up?"

"We could, I dare say, but we aren't going

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to. I'm going to send a report to the Press Association myself to-morrow—and Reuter's too. I am a real pressman, I assure you, Cheyne, dear. Not a driver of a wagon."

Cheyne looked stunned. "You—you're going to split?"

"I am."

"Then there's no need for me to wait that fortnight?" I asked.

"Not the slightest."

Mainwaring took one look at me as I turned on Cheyne.

"WHAT'S the next item of the evening's entertainment, Austin?" he asked.

"A boxing-contest by the look of it. Come back to the door you others. Bring the lamp, one of you."

"What's the matter with you?" Cheyne said angrily as I put my hand on his shoulder.

"Nothing. Only your room's dirty and I'm going to dust it out. You're the duster."

He put up a good scrap, I'll say that for him, but I was in that state of rage I could have pulled him to pieces with my hands, and he never stood a chance from the first. He laid my cheek open and shut one eye for me, all fair hitting; but then he lost his temper, broke a tumbler on the table-edge and tried to jab my face with it.

I don't stand slum-gutter tricks like that from any man, so I stopped fighting according to rules and hit him anywhere I could. The broken tumbler flew one way and he another. Then I caught him by the waist and slammed him on the table, but it was a crazy thing, and let him through.

Then he grabbed a table-leg and came for me with that, and I snatched it away and knocked him across the writing-table, breaking the window with his head.

Then he tried the same game with a chair, and I knocked him and the chair together into the fireplace and damaged all three of them.

He got up again even after that, and I got him on the point of the chin and once more under the ear as he stumbled backward.

That finished it. There he lay, almost as quiet as Van Noppen. As for him, he'd never stirred the whole time, though when we'd done the room was like—I don't know what it was like. Mainwaring's first words serve as well as any other description.

"Like Tophet on a Bank Holiday," he suggested, as he advanced into the room again with the others. "Your methods are somewhat drastic."

"I've been waiting for him a long time," I said. "Besides, did you see him try that broken-tumbler business?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, that's perfectly all right. I'm not blaming you in the least. Only I hope you haven't got any grievance against me by any chance."

We had a drink all round and, speaking for myself, I wanted it. Then the others gave brandy to Cheyne and Van Noppen to bring them to while I had a wash, to get off the blood and dirt, in the wash-hand-basin—about the only breakable thing in the room that wasn't smashed. I've heard of breaking a partnership, but I never heard the word so well applied as then. Everything in the place was smashed and most of it was past mending.

BUT we all felt very fit and cheerful—hilarious even—all except Cheyne and Van Noppen, that is. The other three put Cheyne to bed and, telling Van Noppen to consider himself a prisoner till the morning, they shut him in the cabin of the *Luck and Charity* and put Sellick on sentry-go at the companion.

Van Noppen made no remarks. He was cowed and went aboard as quietly as a lamb. Then Colley said it was too early to go to bed and we'd have a fireworks display. He tied a hammer on the end of a walking-stick, put one of the two crystals he had saved on a biggish stone and hit it with the hammer. The second crystal I dropped afterward into the water off the wharf. We couldn't use it for a repeat performance because the first crystal split the steel head of the hammer and we couldn't find any pieces of the stone it was on.

Nice stuff it was. It was a mercy the flying bits of stone didn't injure anybody, but we were past worrying about that at the time.

In cold truth we were all a bit hysterical, as men may well be on discovering after the event that they have barely escaped, skins whole and no bones broken, from a very nasty death. And Cheyne's whisky didn't tend to make us any more sober. It was

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past three o'clock when I went to bed—in the fo'castle, because Van Noppen was imprisoned aft—and then I left the others on deck, sitting and singing choruses to the accompaniment of Sellick's mandolin.

When I awoke the sun was high enough to send a dusty beam down the fo'castle-companion, lighting the grimy place like a lamp. Voogdt was asleep in the adjoining bunk, and Sellick moved about quietly packing up his traps to go. 'Kiah had relieved him on deck, he said, and Mainwaring and Colley were gone back to Terneuzen. When Voogdt turned out he told us we could release Van Noppen, and sent me to the town to hire laborers.

"Get half a dozen stout men," he said. "We'll get one last cargo across and I'll keep my startling revelations for the English press. Charity begins at home, don't it?"

Aided by quite a little crowd of men we got about forty-five tons into our hold before sailing on the evening tide. Cheyne never showed himself all day, and I haven't seen him since. We left him in bed, in a badly battered condition, sole legatee to the sheds, stock, plant and good-will of that once-flourishing concern, The Axel Trading-Company.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE WHIMSICAL EXIT OF A DAFT LOON

A QUICK voyage brought us to Erith, where we found Ward waiting for us, ready to greet us like long-lost brothers. A couple of hours' talk sufficed to bring his information up to date, and it was agreed between us that Voogdt should announce the wolframite-deposits as soon as he pleased.

He told us that Miss Brand and Miss Lavington had come to Erith with him, and that we were to join them at dinner that same evening at his hotel. As to the cargo, which a dozen sturdy dockers were slinging out on the quay-side while we talked, he would sell that at once by wire, without any attempt at concealment, and so conclude our last deal in wolframite.

As a matter of fact, customers proved shy, all of a sudden. Rumor was already busy about the discovery of large deposits, and the market was very shaky.

After three hours of wiring to and fro it was Cheyne's customer and confederate who bought the stuff. He made a contemptuous offer of a hundred pounds a ton, and I should like to have seen his face when Ward promptly accepted it. It wasn't the sort of price we had been accustomed to, but four thousand five hundred pounds was better than eighteen hundred, which was about what he got for it at the end of the week.

When I asked Ward how I stood, he told me the syndicate owed me ten thousand pounds, so we called 'Kiah aft, told him he was a gentleman at large with money in the bank, and I made him a present of the *Luck and Charity*. True, I had once sworn I would keep her always, but in 'Kiah's hands she was still in the happy family, and more useful to 'Kiah than to me. 'Kiah, the fool, almost sniveled instead of being grateful, until Ward told him the boat should be done up and turned into a yacht again at his charges and that he would charter her for three months every year.

"What about yu?" he said to me, still sniffing.

"I'm going deep-sea again. But I'll take a holiday every Summer and spend it aboard here with Mr. Ward."

"An' Mr. Vute?"

"He'll come, of course."

It was like promising a child presents to keep it from crying.

"An' Missie?" Miss Brand, he meant.

"Yes, she shall come, too," Ward assured him.

"An' what be I to do all next Weenter?" he complained.

"Lay the boat up at Topsham and work on her yourself, you fool."

I was losing patience with him.

"How be I to get 'er round there single-'anded?"

"Oh, dry up!" I said. "I'll give you a hand round with her, if that's all. You'll be Cap'n Pym when you get home, man."

That comforted him a bit, I think, for he said no more and went on deck to survey his new property. Ward laughed when he was gone.

" 'Kiah's hard to please, isn't he?"

"He's sorry the partnership's over, I suppose. And so am I, in a way, though it's nearly turned me gray before my time."

The new feeling of ownership soon bore

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fruit, for in the afternoon 'Kiah informed me that he had arranged with the skipper of the Erith tug to give him a tow down that night as far as the Medway. The tug was taking a string of barges to Sheerness, and 'Kiah's frugal Devon soul couldn't resist the temptation of cheap towage.

" 'Tedn' no gude stoppin' about yer, is it?" he asked, rather shamefacedly.

"I'm going out to dinner to-night," I said.

"That's all right. 'E don't start 'fore midnight. They barges be a 'eavy load an' 'e wants to get the ebb be'ind 'em t' 'elp du 'is work."

"All right. I don't mind. But I sha'n't be aboard before midnight, mind."

He agreed, said that would be in plenty of time and went ashore to do the necessary marketing for us both.

WHEN the evening came and we were all at dinner together I felt some sympathy with his grumbling. Never was a pleasanter party, but I couldn't hide from myself that it meant saying good-by to the four people I liked better than any folk I had ever met. Our partnership was over. No doubt we should meet again, often and often—most of the talk at table was about such future meetings—but I knew we should never meet quite in the same spirit as before.

There would no longer be the common interest. They would find out that I was a rough-mannered sailor, and perhaps I should feel that they, soft-handed and town-sheltered, weren't my sort either.

After dinner came the first farewell, when we all went to see Voogdt off at the station. We had lingered talking longer than we should have done, with the result that we just managed to miss the last train—the eleven forty-five. None of us took the matter seriously, except Voogdt, who declared that he must get to Fleet Street before one in the morning.

"We've all been too careless. There's been too much talking," he said. "Look at Cheyne's pal to-day. Another twenty-four hours of rumor—rumor—rumor—and my little bit o' news'll be stale. I've got to get in with it to-night."

I suggested hiring a motor-car in Erith, but he pursed up his lips.

"H'm—yes," said he. "Yes, if the worst comes to the worst. An hour and ten minutes to wake up a garage, get a driver and go say seventeen miles. It's cutting it fine. Wonder if there's an up-goods?"

A UNIFORMED official emerging at the moment from the booking-office, he asked him the same question.

"Any business of yours?" was the reply.

"I've missed the last train. Any chance of getting to Cannon Street by twelve-thirty?"

"No, there ain't," the man replied rudely. "There's a fast goods due in seven minutes, but she don't stop 'ere, an' if she did you couldn't ride on 'er."

"You the station-master?" Voogdt enquired with suave politeness.

"No, I ain't." Evidently the question had touched a sore spot. "But I'm the night-foreman an' what I says goes. An' what I says is no passenger rides on goods-trains when I'm on duty."

He turned his back on us and, ordering a porter to turn down the station lamps, retired to the office again.

"What a thing it is to have the laws of the Medes and Persians and the South Eastern Railway behind you," said Voogdt. "Civility costs nothing, anyhow. If he'd been polite, I'd have hired that car. As 'tis, I go by goods-train. Good-by, you folks."

He glanced toward the solitary porter lowering the lights, and then went quickly down the platform in the opposite direction. Nearing the last lamp he broke into a run and disappeared into the darkness of the cutting. The last we saw of him he seemed to be slipping off his coat.

"What does the madman mean doing now?" asked Ward.

"Isn't he wonderful?" said Miss Brand in an excited whisper. She was jigging up and down on the tips of her toes like a child promised a treat. "Isn't he wonderful? I just love that man. I wonder how he'll manage it. He'll do it, somehow. You'll see. Let's go back to this seat and watch."

We sat down as the porter neared us, leaving a line of dim lamps behind him. As he passed by he scowled at us, having evidently taken his cue from the foreman, but he said nothing, and just as he reached the spot where Voogdt had disappeared an engine whistled in the distance.

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When he was half-way back to us the whistle was repeated, again and yet again, nearer and nearer each time. The man stopped to look round, and beyond him red and green engine lights came sliding slowly round a bend of the line. The cutting echoed and reëchoed with her whistling until it became one continuous scream; and, accompanied by the grinding of brakes and the clank, clank, clank of couplings and buffers—all the confused noises of heavy rolling-stock arrested suddenly at top speed—the train came to a standstill.

The night-foreman, suddenly become a hurried, anxious man, came out of his office at a run, and in obedience to his orders the porter set off down the cutting to see what was the matter. Waiting the result of his inquiries, the foreman walked impatiently up and down and in passing stopped to peer at us in the dimness.

"Wasn't there five of ye?" he snapped out.

"There were five," Ward corrected him.

"Then where's t'other one?"

"Gone to get a conveyance to London," said Ward, with perfect truth.

"Hrrumph!" grunted he, like the pig he was, and went to meet the porter, who came running up the platform out of breath, with a familiar-looking hat in his hand.

"Found this here over the bull's-eye of the 'ome signal," he explained. "An' the driver says the distant light's out, too."

Shouted inquiries to the signal-box elicited the information that the distant signal-lamp was still burning.

"I don't care what t' driver says, nor Jimmy, neither," the signalman bellowed across the line. "I tell 'ee the lamps is burning. Th' indicator says so, anyway. An' line's clear, no matter about lights. Pass 'er through with a 'and-lamp and then you can go an' look at the signals f'r y'r-selves. Be ye goin' to keep 'er 'ere all night while you an' Jimmy bides hollerin' about signals?"

There was more shouting and, after much waving of a green hand-lamp, the train whistled shortly and began to clank-clank her way toward the station.

As the engine labored along between the platforms, the driver and our foreman managed to exchange a little bad language, and the foreman turned his back to us to shout after the aggrieved driver. In the middle of the train was a row of half a dozen trucks of machinery covered by tarpaulins, and from under one of them emerged a shirt-sleeved arm.

Voogdt's head, hatless, followed it.

The foreman was coming within arm's length of him, and the shirt-sleeved arm projected farther and farther until in passing it neatly tipped his peaked cap over his eyes. Before he had recovered his balance and his sight both arm and face had disappeared again beneath the tarpaulin.

We got up to go, but Miss Brand had still one shot in her locker.

"I think that's such a pretty custom of yours," she said innocently to the foreman.

"Wha's that?" demanded that official, raging.

"Playing peep-bo with goods-guards," said she. "Good-night, Mr.—er—Station-Master."

CHAPTER XL

AN EDUCATED WOMAN

ON THE way back I suggested we should stroll down as far as the *Luck and Charity* and give our regards to Captain Pym. But Miss Lavington said she was tired, and Ward wouldn't come either.

"Cap'n Pym'll want me to give him a mortgage on my life, if I do," he said laughing. "I've helped pacify him once already to-day."

In the end Miss Brand and myself set off together, my knees shaking with funk, for I meant asking her to marry me, and didn't dare set about it. 'Kiah wasn't aboard, and the fo'castle and cabin were locked, so we could only walk up and down the deck and talk and wait for him.

I tried to bring the conversation round to herself, but she headed me off every time, and after a long half hour said she could wait no longer. I said I'd walk home with her, reckoning on plucking up enough courage to ask her on the way. But her manner became chilly at once.

"I don't want you to see me home," she snapped. "D'you think I can't look after myself?"

"I'm sorry," I said meekly, with my heart down in my boots. "I'd—I'd like to come part way with you, if I may."

"All right," she said, not over-graciously, and we went ashore together, she leading the way up the gangplank.

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CLIMBING the gangway she slipped, just as Voogdt had slipped some months before, but I caught her from behind and swung her to safety. That one moment did it. Somehow—I suppose it was because of her prickly, stand-off ways and the sturdy independence of her—I hadn't realized that her girl's body would be so slenderly soft and warm; and when we stood together on the wharf-edge I still kept one arm around her, holding her to me.

Her face, close to mine, looked white and frightened against the night. Her big eyes seemed larger and darker than ever, and the smell of her hair—just the sweet natural smell of her—seemed to choke me. For the life of me I couldn't speak.

She could, but she spoke low, and all her arrogance was gone.

"Let me go," she said, but she never moved, and for all answer I shook my head.

"You must. Let me go."

"I won't," I said huskily, finding my voice. "I—I love you."

"That's nonsense."

The words were determined enough, but the voice was something new to me, weak and doubtful.

"Nonsense. You can't. I've always been hateful to you, and—and you never seemed to care whether I was or not. Let me go. Please."

She could have shaken my arm off easily enough, for I held her as gently as a little child; but she never tried, and I plucked up courage a bit.

"I won't. I want you. You've never been out of my mind since that first day—when you slapped my face on Exmouth Beach. It was your slap in the face made me knock off drink, and go back to work and all that. D'you think a man pulls up like that for nothing?"

"You mustn't say it. You mustn't."

"Why not? I love you, I tell you. I will say it."

"Not to me. Ooh! not to me——"

She almost wailed it: her voice went up in a little shaky whine, and I thought she was going to cry. Out went my other hand, and she was in my arms. I suppose she felt like choking, too: her beating heart lifted her, breast and lips, and in that moment her face was on my shoulder.

"Why—you love me, too!" I said, almost scared with the sudden surprise of it.

"Do I? I don't know. This love—this awful love!"

She began to cry in real earnest, her face quivering against my cheek.

"Awful, is it?" I laughed, for my heart was singing in me, and the world only a little ball underfoot that spun to the time of its beating.

"Of course it's awful. There seems no escape," she said. "Haven't I seen the hateful thing everywhere? In the laboratory, watched through the microscope the rushing together of tiniest live atoms—shameless little beasts! Haven't I seen how all the scheme of life was tangled up with it, from the highest to the lowest, till even I was almost afraid! Afraid, I tell you. Blown pollen in the moving grasses; bees in the flowers—cell seeking cell everywhere—all telling the same thing——"

She was crying hysterically now, crying with fear, as a trapped animal cries, her eyes running over, and her dear nose wet and red. Clumsily I tried to kiss it.

"Dear," I said. "Dear, what is it? I don't understand——"

"OF COURSE you don't. You dear silly, how could you? . . . But I'm an educated woman, and I looked the thing in the face—and defied it. In all the crowded world, mad about this love-business, I saw it was thinkers who were wanted—detached men and women, working for good. . . . I'd be one of them. That was to be my life—to show how a free woman should live. I wouldn't love: I swore I wouldn't. . . . There's so much to be done for women, and they themselves won't do it. They'll never do it. They can't. They swear to devote themselves to the cause, and—and then a man lays hands on them, and where are their vows? No cause is anything to them any more. A man holds them and kisses them, and all's over. To have babies and hang up their washing in the back-yard, that's the outside of their ambitions, ever after. But I—I'd be different. . . Ooh, the shame of it! Here am I, crying on a man's shoulder like any housemaid. . . . And I wouldn't be anywhere else for worlds! That's the worst of it. . . . All I can spare the cause is a fit of crying and some regrets. Ooh, I'm a Judas! . . . But I'll have my thirty pieces of silver. Kiss me on my nose again. You dear. . . . What's the use of making vows?

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What's the use of educating women, if it's all to end like this?"

Her face snuggled into my neck and she grew quieter.

"It seems a lot of fuss to make about nothing," I said at length, smoothing her shoulder with my hand. I spoke gently, thinking to comfort her, but she was up again in a moment, struggling in my arms.

"Nothing, do you call it?" she cried. "You—you men, you drift through life with no aim beyond getting your living and keeping a home. I had an ideal—a woman strong enough to put aside all thoughts of home and live for other women. And I've failed. I'm no better than any little dressmaker——"

"I don't like to hear you sneering at housemaids and dressmakers," I said.

"Who's sneering at them? Poor little souls! You can't blame them for loving a man. They've nothing else to live for. But we educated women, we ought to be different. The only girls I've ever sneered at were girls of my own class who deserted the cause of the housemaid and dressmaker. And now I'm as bad as any one of them—and you call it nothing! Would you call it nothing if you'd planned out all your life, and all your plans came tumbling about your ears? Do you call it nothing, to think yourself fit to lead a forlorn hope, and then find yourself such a common fool as to choke and be happy because a brown-faced sailor kissed you?"

"Are you happy, then?"

"Ooh!" Again she wriggled her face closer against mine. "Isn't it wonderful? And, oh! I am ashamed of myself, to give in like this. And won't I make you pay for it, just!"

"Make me pay for what?"

I was startled at her vicious tone.

"For pulling me aside from the straight path. For giving other women—poor dears, what do they know about it?—the chance to sneer at me as a deserter. . . . But it sha'n't be for long. When this marriage business is over, back I go to the lecture-platform."

"I'm afraid it won't run to that, little girl," I said. "You can't keep house for a poor man, and run about the country lecturing as well."

"Poor? What do you call poor?"

"Well, I've nothing but this money we've cleared since you took us into partnership. It'll bring in a few hundreds a year—a good useful sum, I grant, but not enough to live on, idling. I must get some work as well——"

"A few hundreds!" she burst out, and laughed. "Why, you dear stupid, I'm rich. I've got thousands of pounds!"

IF SHE'D slapped me in the face again, as at our first meeting, she couldn't have startled me more.

"Good Lord!" I said; and again, "Good Lord! Where on earth did you get that from?"

"From the same place as you got your few hundreds, of course. I was the biggest share-holder. Nance was only my trustee. And you never knew? We used to wonder whether you did, when you talked as though she and Leonard owned the show."

"Of course I never knew," I said. "I thought you were her paid companion, and she'd given you a share or two out of kindness . . . And you're rich. And after marriage you want to go lecturing. . . . That won't do, Pam'ly, dear."

"What won't do? What d'you mean?"

"I mean I won't marry you on those terms. You rich and independent, and scorning housekeeping! That won't do for me. I love you dearly, love the sight of you and the sound of your voice, but I marry no woman on such terms."

"What terms do you object to?"

Again she struggled to be free. This time I released her and we stood trying to peer at each other in the darkness.

"Your freedom," I said. "This semi-detached notion of marriage. A tolerated stupid husband at home, and a clever wife on lecture-tours. That's no good to me. My wife must be my woman altogether—my partner—the keeper of my home——"

"Your property! Your squaw!"

She cut in contemptuously, but I'd had one moment of her in surrender, and I had no mind to lose the feeling.

"Since you choose the words, yes. Just that. To carry half the burden, to love and honor and obey, as the Church Service says. Love, I think you give. Your honor and respect I'll try to earn. And as for obedience, I'm old-fashioned, Pam'ly dearie, and I'll have that too."

"Never from me!" she cried.

"Even from you. I needn't tell you

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again how I love you, but I'll have obedience, or I'll have nothing."

"Nothing it is, then," she said, and turned and, stepping lightly and fast, walked away from me along the quay.

FOR a moment or two I stood still, stupefied, then thinking she might fall over the quay-side, ran along the quay calling her—softly, for fear anybody was about. Then I saw her pass under a lamp up an alley between two sheds. She had a handkerchief in her hand, so I thought perhaps she was crying again, and ran after her as fast as I could, catching her up under the shadow of some big warehouses. She turned as I reached her, but the handkerchief was out of sight by then.

"What do you want?" she asked coldly.

"I want to see you clear of these slums."

"Go away," she said. "I hate you."

"Hate and love come easily to you," I answered bitterly. "One moment it's your precious Cause. Then you say you love me, and cry because that means desertion. And then you, that talked of leaving your Cause for love of me, hate me because I ask obedience for love. Your love and hate are shallow. More fool I to care for either!"

"Go away," she said again.

"I won't. I can't leave you here alone, so if I mayn't walk with you, I'll follow you. Go on."

She hesitated, but I'd heard enough of her arguments, and I didn't wait for her to speak.

"Go on," I said again, harshly, and for once she obeyed.

I followed her till she reached a better-lighted street and then stopped, watched her out of sight and returned to the boat, wretched.

CHAPTER XLI

AFTER ALL——

IT WAS a bad hour for me, after I boarded the *Luck and Charity* again that night. I was glad Voogdt had gone, for I couldn't have stood questions even from him just then.

There was no light in the fo'castle, so I judged 'Kiah was still ashore, and I was glad of that, too, for though he wouldn't be likely to come aft and disturb me it was some small comfort to have the boat to myself. But he had evidently been aboard, for the cabin-door was unlocked, and I went inside, wishing I were dead; and there I sat like a sick beast in a hole, my arms across the table and my head upon them, dull with misery.

Of course, I knew all along I'd been a fool to hope. Though I had thought her poor, I always knew she was above me. I don't mean in the ordinary class-distinctions, but in herself. She was all life and fire and intelligence—an educated woman, as she had said herself. How could I hope to get such a woman for a wife?

If it had been Voogdt, now, with his brains and clever tongue, they would have made a match. But my slow wits would have only made me a drag on her. How could she have introduced me with any pride, me the brown-faced sailor she had spoken of, to the clever people she was accustomed to meet daily? How should I have shaped with my crab shoulders and heavy fists on suffrage-platforms?

I'd seen all that plainly enough before, and I don't think I had ever really dared to hope until this very evening, when she as good as said she loved me.

But all the same I wouldn't go back on what I'd said. When man and woman meet on equal terms, even then it's better the man should have the casting vote, when they don't agree. But when the wife is clever and rich and the husband poor and not over-smart, then there's all the more need for the husband making sure of obedience.

She lecturing and traveling in luxury, dragging me in her train? That would never do. And I couldn't see it would be any better leaving me behind. Besides, with all her wits, she was a feather-brain. "I love you. I hate you." Perhaps even a stupid husband might ballast her a bit, but she must be obedient if he was to be of any use. If she loved me, she would be glad to obey. Since she wouldn't promise obedience she didn't love—that was all I could make of it, and to marry a rich woman on such terms was more than I could do.

So I made up my mind that my hopes were over; that I should probably never see my girl again except from the back of some audience she was addressing, and that

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my love-affair was ended where it began, in those ten minutes of caress and quarrel by a port water-side.

I'd got to get away to sea again—deep-sea trading. Now I wasn't pressed for money I could afford to pick and choose my ship. Not a liner, for choice. I was in no mood to be civil to a lot of chattering passengers. But I thought I could get a berth in one of the big trading-lines—Stent's, to Rio and the River Plata, or Willing's, to the East. Somewhere well away, with plenty of work to do, and deep-sea breezes to make me forget.

Just this last run down-coast with the old *Luck and Charity*, and then away, out of it all. I was fond of the old boat, but I felt I couldn't stay aboard her a day longer than was needful. She—that girl—she'd been aboard too often. Every corner of the old boat held some reminiscence of her. Dozens of times she had sat where I was sitting now. The little cabin had echoed to her chatter over the teacups, or her laughter at Voogdt's nonsense. It gave me the blues to sit there all alone, and think of her living out her plans ashore.

I HEARD 'Kiah come aboard and go into the fo'castle, and half an hour later shouting from the barges told me the tug was in sight. When I got on deck the tide was full, the quay-side below the level of gunwale, so I called 'Kiah and cast off the stern warp. Muffled in his greatcoat he came aft to the wheel, stepping quickly and forgetting to cast off forward. I was too miserable to tell him of it, so went and did it myself, and then threw a line to the last barge, already fast to the tug and commencing to swing away from the quay. Somebody in the barge pulled at the line till the tow-rope was aboard, shouted "All right," and I went back aft.

"Call me when they cast off the tow," I said to 'Kiah.

He grunted and I went below again.

Head on hands I must have dropped off to sleep, and woke perhaps half an hour later with a start. For the moment I thought it was dawn. The cabin was light as day, the hanging lamp burning a smoky yellow, and there was a terrific row going on outside. Men's voices shouted all round us, and on deck, just overhead, a woman was screeching for help.

I WAS up there in three jumps, but even if I hadn't been confused and scared out of my wits it was too late to be of any use. When I went below it was pitch-dark, so dark that I could scarcely make out 'Kiah's figure at the wheel, but now everything stared ghastly white under the converging rays of three great searchlights centered on us.

We were alone in a great circle of glaring light. The tow-rope hung loosely over the side, and the tug and barges had disappeared into the blackness. Not a hundred feet away was an armored cruiser, her bows crowded with men, coming straight down on us, her propellers thrashing furiously astern. Behind her, dim as a street lamp seen from a lighted room, was the Nore light, and I saw we had somehow drifted into the navigable channel of the Medway.

In that same glance I saw the cruiser was lowering a boat, men tumbling into it anyhow as it slid from the davits. 'Kiah was nowhere to be seen, and in his place, dressed in his cap and overcoat, clinging to the wheel and screaming with terror, was Pamily Brand!

"Oh, you!" she cried. "I thought you'd never come. Take this thing, for Heaven's sake!"

I measured the distance to the cruiser with my eye, and saw it was a hopeless case. She couldn't miss us, try as she would. That little fool of a girl had steered wide of the barges she should have followed, and either the cruiser must cut them down—and perhaps the tug, too—or sink us. It was no good their going astern; she had too much way on to stop.

The thought of the girl under those whirling propellers made me sick, so I semaphored the cruiser frantically with my hands to stop her engines. When she was closer I shouted it, fit to burst my lungs.

"Stop your engines," I roared; heard them stop—and then she was on us.

Poor old *Luck and Charity!* Good old ship! She'd been my home through good times and through bad, and it was pitiful to see the end of her like that. Not that I had much time to waste on pity; there was that mischievous devil of a girl to look after.

She clung to my arm, quiet now, as the cruel ram of that beastly cruiser slid under my poor old boat, lifted and canted her over a little and then sliced off her bows,

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cutting through hull and spar and rigging easily as a plowshare cuts through grass-roots in a field. It was over in a second; crash and slice; and the steep gray bulk was sliding past us, growing higher and higher as we sank.

THERE was nothing gallant or picturesque about our rescue. Our navy doesn't wave flags and shout; it just does its job and grumbles about it afterward. Being all wood, the *Luck and Charity* sank slowly, and we sat on the highest part of her stern until the cruiser's boat took us off. We were then about waist deep, sitting. The boat backed away just as the sinking hull turned. The black water rolled over her, and that was the last of my poor old boat. There was a quiet order, the men gave way at the oars and we were off in pursuit of the receding cruiser's searchlight.

Drenched and muddled as I was, my wits all wool-gathering with the sudden confusion of it all, I never thought of 'Kiah till then—and then with a sudden chill at heart.

"Where's 'Kiah?" I cried to the whimpering, shivering girl. "You—where's 'Kiah?"

"Ashore."

She was crying quietly, and I ought to have pitied her, but I was past that.

"When did he get ashore?"

"He never c-came on board. I met him and told him your orders were that he must sleep ashore to-night—and then I c-came in his place."

"What on earth did you do that for?" I asked furiously, but she wouldn't answer.

The men rowing regarded us stolidly, but I could see the midshipman in charge was alive with curiosity, so I asked no more questions.

WHEN we got aboard the cruiser—two men had to help her up the gangway, for her sopped skirt clung about her so that she could scarcely walk—I asked her again what she meant by it. For the moment we were alone, the crew that had picked us up busy hoisting their boat aboard, and nobody near us but a wooden-faced marine on sentry-go. Still she wouldn't answer, but only stood there sniffing and shivering with her head down, like a naughty child being scolded.

"Tell me," I said. "I will know what you meant by it."

"I wanted to go to sea with you alone."

She looked up at me sidewise, and there was a gleam of wickedness in her eye.

"What on earth for?" I demanded, raging.

Her hair was coming down and hung across her face; her clothes dripped, clinging about her, and if ever she looked a child of the gutter she did then. But her tears had stopped and to all seeming she had composed herself, for confident impudence shone in her eyes behind their tangled veil of hair.

"I—I thought I'd show you a woman was as good as a man," she said.

"You've shown it by sinking 'Kiah's boat."

"Y-yes. But I can give him a better one. There's—something else——"

"What's that?"

"I—I've been away with you alone. You've compromised my reputation. And now you can't in decency refuse to marry me, can you? You will, won't you?" She came close beside me, wheedling. "You will marry me, won't you? And—and we'll decide about that obedience business afterward. I'll promise to say 'obey' in the marriage service if you like. It's only a matter of form. Isn't it?"

THE END

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ONCE IN HIS LIFE

By Austin Philips

"TO THE right here, sir," said the detective from the back seat of the dog-cart, turning round and touching John Budgeon on the arm.

"Thanks, Jennifer!"

John Budgeon nodded over his shoulder; then spoke sharply to the man at his side.

"What are you doing, driver? We want Sennen Cove!"

"I thought you'm belonged to go to Land's End." The man's mumble came grudging and very slow. "I don't see as I can drive you down here, gentlemen. The mare was out before breakfast, and we're ten miles from Penzance."

"You can't drive us—— But——"

John Budgeon broke off. Used as he was to ordering and to having his orders attended to, he was ready to compromise when it suited his purpose and when insistence might upset his plans. He had seen the mare's knee-guards. He had noticed the mare's weak back. And since he proposed that she should take a fourth passenger back to Penzance in the dog-cart, he let the driver have his way.

"All right, then. You put up at the inn there, on the left. We shall be gone perhaps two hours—that—yes, it's just eleven now. That will be one o'clock."

"Very soon, sir. One o'clock, sir. I'll be ready, waiting by the Church Town."

"Thank you."

John Budgeon—he was big-built and broad-chested—got heavily out of the cart. The detective—he was of medium height, dark-mustached and active—vaulted to the ground. The two men began to descend the curving road. Before them the sea spread itself; the sea of Cornwall, calm, though it was December, bright, serene and blue. To the right a great bay was visible, sandy and rock-encircled, with houses niched among the cliffs. To the left, where the road led them, nothing as yet showed itself save sloping, grass-clad pastures where sheep and cattle fed.

As the two men advanced, the bay to the right grew plainer and the road went steadily down. Suddenly, on the left, houses obtruded themselves—cottages, a farm, a hotel—while below, a little bay, within the big bay, opened, and a breakwater went arm-and-elbow-wise into the sea. The tide lapped lazily over a half-covered patch of rocks. And the sun sparkled upon black and huddled roofs.

"That's Sennen, sir," said the detective, pointing downward. "I came here once when I was spending a holiday with my aunt at St. Just. It's a beautiful place, sir, don't you think?"

"It's all right," said John Budgeon inattentively.

Beautiful places were small concern of his. He went downward, heavily; the flesh of his fat legs shaking visibly despite his trousers, and his neck growing purple from the heat. What had he to do with scenery? He had other things to think of, or he would not have been who and where he was. It is not by looking at scenery that a man becomes that hybrid servant of the public—neither clerk nor actual policeman

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—a post-office investigator. John Budgeon's official salary was five hundred pounds a year. He traveled first-class; he drew fifteen shillings a day for hotel-expenses and, though he was not next on the list for promotion, he had caught so many thieves that he was certain to be made senior investigator—with another hundred pounds *per annum*—when the present holder retired upon a pension at the end of the current year.

John Budgeon, in short—he had the face of a prosperous butcher—was a man in high repute with his chiefs.

It was that repute which Jennifer, the detective, unconsciously deferred to as he addressed the investigator now.

"I suppose he'll come it all right, sir," he said.

It was statement he made, not question that he asked.

"Oh, yes."

John Budgeon spoke as if the matter were accomplished; his tone was most confident, most assured.

"Yes, I shall knock an admission out of him in five minutes and—oh, yes, it's a snip, Jennifer—a snip."

"I suppose it is, sir. And it isn't often *you* fail to get an admission—especially in a case like this!"

He opened the door of a little shop of much merchandise. A bell tinkled. He stood upon a stone floor. Steps sounded in the little house. The postmistress appeared. She was a tall woman, Spanish-faced, dark-eyed.

"Please?" she said, and clipped the word as she spoke.

John Budgeon assumed the breezy air which masked his business mood.

"Ah, good morning, good morning!" he said. "Could you ah—er—hum—does Mr. Penberthy live here?"

"Surely no, sir." The postmistress shook her head. "Mr. Penberthy belong to live with his mother—down along by 'm boat-house—the last cottage in the cove it is. You can't miss 'em, sir. 'T is a white cottage with a black roof."

"Thank you, madam. I thank you. *Good* day to you."

John Budgeon lifted his hat. He passed out, closing the door with a bang, so that the bell went swinging again, lustily tinkling a farewell. John Budgeon strode forward, the fat on his legs ashake. The detective put himself into step with him. The pair passed on, in silence, along a natural terrace which ran above the sea.

"Here is the boat-house," said John Budgeon, half to himself, half to his companion. "And here is the cottage where Penberthy lives. It is not white as the woman said. It is yellow. These people are born liars. I know their type of old. Now, Jennifer, be ready to slip inside."

"Yes, sir."

THE detective nodded, and put himself behind his chief.

John Budgeon advanced, passed through the tiny porch, knocked boldly at the blue-painted door. There was a pause. Then the door opened. And, imperceptibly—with the swiftness born of long habit—John Budgeon's right foot intruded itself in such a manner that the door might not again be closed. And the owner of the foot, with that breezy business air of his, began to speak.

"Good morning. Good morning to you. Does Mr. Penberthy live here?"

There was a gap of silence. Then the opener of the door managed to speak.

"G-good m-morning, sir. I—I am M-Mister Penberthy. Do you w-want to see m-me?"

"If you please," said John Budgeon, smiling. "May I come in?"

He had spoken with a breezy courtesy. But he did not wait for the permission that he had sought. He bulked forward, and the door swung inward. The man inside stepped back. After John Budgeon the detective followed.

They stood in a typical cottage kitchen-room with a grandfather's clock, a yellow wooden thing—half chest of drawers, half dresser—a tin pail or two, a highly polished fireplace, an oil-stove, all these making a ring of squareness round a shining slate-slabbed floor. On the walls were colored pictures—Lord Roberts, General Buller, Grace Darling pulling single-handed to a wreck. Under a little window was a well-scrubbed deal table; a bench on the window-side of it; on the other side a chair.

John Budgeon sat down on the bench with an air of being at home; though, for no apparent reason, he shivered suddenly, looked round him and passed his hand across his forehead as if he would combat a memory or a thought. Perhaps it was that

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he found the situation strange to him, since he seldom came into cottage interiors but took grave cases among the haunts of men; indeed he had taken this case only because, being at Camborne, the papers from London had been sent him to save the expense of sending a junior colleague to the west.

The detective lingered by the doorway. The young man stood between them, long and pale and haggard; the whiteness of his face contrasting curiously with the blackness of his morning coat, the long tails and urban aspect of which quarreled absurdly with this cottage kitchen and the week-day atmosphere of this village at the end of the world.

John Budgeon looked at him with a smile that was genial and cruel—the very handmaid of fear. Obviously, he had succeeded in combating and expelling that disturbing memory or thought.

"Sit down," he said, suavely yet commandingly. And he pointed to the chair.

"Yes, sir," said the young man. He sat down, twisting his hands nervously; his tongue licking at dry lips. John Budgeon, hand-bag on the table, looked up in the act of taking out some papers. The signs—the old signs—were not lost on him. His smile widened as he looked down again at the documents which he withdrew. They were these:

(1) An ordinary post-office savings-bank-book.

(2) An ordinary post-office "notice of withdrawal."

(3) An ordinary post-office "warrant" for the payment of a sum withdrawn from a post-office savings-bank-account.

He also took a sheet of foolscap, folded it down the middle and headed each side of the fold thus:

Question. . . .

Answer. . . .

He also took from a leathern socket-thing (which was pinned to a waistcoat-pocket) a fountain pen, very heavy with gold. He adjusted it. He cleared his throat.

The detective, behind the young man's chair, looked admiringly on. It was always worth watching Mr. Budgeon tackle a suspect. Mr. Budgeon was great—quite great! Mr. Budgeon spoke. His voice was a thought less suave.

"I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. James Penberthy, I think."

"Yes, sir." The young man's voice was scarcely audible and he hardly whispered his reply.

"Thank you—yes. And you were formerly in the employment of Messrs. Pullar, Radice & Tyler of Oxford Street?"

"Yes."

"Who subsequently discharged you, I understand."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I—I was not strong enough for the work."

"Ah, quite so, quite so."

Mr. Budgeon leaned back a little, thumb in waistcoat, easing his great broad chest.

"They gave you a good character—quite good—in fact most excellent—and you tried to get work elsewhere?"

"Yes. I tried everywhere. But—there was no room."

"I suppose not. Well, that does not concern me; I have other questions to ask. Tell me, Mr. Penberthy: what did you do when you failed to get work?"

There was no answer. Only the tongue went licking again and the fingers twisted and turned. The detective touched the young man upon the back.

"Answer the gentleman when he speaks to you. What did you do next?"

"I went—I had no money—I went to a friend."

"To a Mr. Borlaze?"

"Yes."

"Quite so."

John Budgeon tapped his pen-top against big white tombstone teeth.

"This Mr. Borlaze was a fellow-assistant of yours at Messrs. Pullar-Radice's shop. He occupied a cubicle there; he 'lived in,' in fact. And, being a brother Cornishman, he took pity upon you and allowed you to share his bed."

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"For ten days."

"While you were looking for work, in fact."

"Yes."

"Thank you."

Mr. Budgeon paused, then leaned well forward. His voice assumed a negligent, even an idle, tone.

"Mr. Penberthy, I am going to ask you certain questions. You need not answer them unless you like. But anything you do say will be taken down in writing and

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may be used in evidence against you—later on."

He stopped. Jennifer, the detective, standing behind the suspect, smiled. Mr. Budgeon *was* clever; in such cleverness lay half the secret of Mr. Budgeon's success. These words, which should have stopped the suspect's mouth, were a veritable coaxing to confess. Mr. Budgeon's voice—he spoke again immediately—became sympathetic, encouraging, tender almost, now.

"Well, my lad—" he tapped with a plump forefinger at the yellow-backed savings-bank-book upon the table — "well, my lad, have you anything you'd like to get off your chest?"

There was no answer. The young man, his face haggard, his eyes very lamps of misery, was staring at the yellow-covered book. Mr. Budgeon spoke again.

"ON THE seventh July last, a notice of withdrawal for the sum of two pounds, and signed by—in the name of your friend, Mr. Borlaze—was received at the post-office savings-bank where Mr. Borlaze had, and has, an account. The withdrawal notice received prompt attention, and a warrant for the payment of two pounds was sent to William Borlaze at the Vere Street post-office to be called for, as the notice of withdrawal asked.

"The warrant was called for, it was presented and—" John Budgeon had the savings-bank-book open and tap-tapped at it—"and this book was presented and the warrant was signed in the name of William Borlaze and the money was paid.

"That was on the eighth of July—the date, curiously enough, on which you said good-by to Mr. Borlaze to come back here to Cornwall to your home. And, more curious still, Mr. Borlaze says that he never filled up the notice of withdrawal or fetched or signed the warrant or took the money out. In fact, so surprised was he—when, several months later, he examined his bank-book and found that he had two pounds less to his credit than he anticipated—that he wrote immediately to St. Martin's-le-Grand and asked that inquiry might be made.

"In fact, Mr. Penberthy—"John Budgeon spoke friendlily, almost confidentially—"that is why I am here. Suspicion has fallen upon you. There are marked resemblances between your handwriting and the handwriting upon the forged documents and I am ready—most ready—believe me, Mr. Penberthy—to hear what you have to say."

Again there was silence. Again John Budgeon spoke. Again he played his trump card—the sympathetic one which so seldom failed when culprits were young and green.

"Well, my lad—" the voice would have done credit to an actor—"well, is there anything you want to tell me now?"

There was one last second of silence. Then the young man leaned forward. His mouth worked convulsively; the Adam's apple in his throat went bumping; and the torrent of truth burst out. As it burst, so John Budgeon's pen flashed over the foolscap—on the "Answer" side of the page.

"I—I—I was starving—in London—and I couldn't get a job. I didn't like to tell my mother—I was ashamed to—and there was a box—a tin box—in the cubicle—under Borlaze's bed. One night—before he came in—I looked for his bank-book and I found it—and I drew the money out. I meant to send it back again—but I was too ill to go fishing and I didn't like to ask my mother for fear she'd find out what I'd done. I suppose it means going to prison—but thank God I've told you—it's a relief to get it *told* to somebody and——"

His voice ceased abruptly, as if he had been knocked on the head. His eyes stared, looking no more at John Budgeon but away to John Budgeon's left.

"Mother!" he gasped. And he would have risen but for the detective's detaining hand. It was John Budgeon who rose instead. And for the second time since he had come into the cottage, he who had confronted a hundred miserable mothers, shivered suddenly and looked round him and passed his hand across his forehead as if to combat a memory or a thought.

"Jim!" said the woman. She had come in by the door at the back of the kitchen. "Jim, oh, Jim!"

And with a sudden instinct of terror her hand clasped at her breast. Something, an unconscious something, told her what manner of men these were. And she turned, swift, maternal, to meet John Budgeon as he advanced. She was of middle height; her face was tanned and florid; but it was criss-crossed from brow to chin with innumerable wrinkles and lines. Her hair was white; her eyebrows were black beneath them; her eyes themselves were blue with

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the blueness of those eyes which have looked long upon windy seas.

To her, advancing, John Budgeon advanced in turn. He spoke. But not in his best or surest official manner. He was—and he knew it—quite unusually nervous, as it might have been some crack games-player who has struck a bad patch and gone stale and out of form.

"You are Mrs. Penberthy," he almost stammered.

"Yes. I'm Martha—I'm Jim's mother. What is it you want with Jim?"

SHE took a step forward—one step, since John Budgeon barred the way. Her son had dropped his arms upon the table, his head was hidden in them; behind him the detective bit awkwardly at that black mustache. Then John Budgeon gave the mother the truth.

"I am sorry to give you bad news," he said—and was vaguely conscious that though he spoke a formula, somehow, for once, the formula seemed to mean something—"but your son has done an extremely foolish thing. He has taken some money out of the savings-bank—some money which belonged to some one else. He has admit—er—hem—made a confession—and I am afraid that—in fact we are taking him back with us to London to-night."

"To London!"

The woman's voice first whispered; then rose, as the truth struck home. "Not to prison—not to prison—for Jim!"

"I'm afraid it means prison," said John Budgeon.

And again an inexplicable weakness, wholly foreign to the habits of thirty official years and a hard and self-centered nature, made him shun her eyes in the speaking and look down and shuffle a foot. He had delivered himself of the same statement to a hundred miserable wives and mothers without one thrill of sympathy, without turning a hair. And yet there was something in the very atmosphere of this cottage which seemed to take away his strength.

Meantime the woman had gone past him, past the detective in a flash. Her arms, white to the elbow with flour from the bread-tub, went round the shoulders of the shiny black morning coat.

"Jim!" she cried. "Jim! Speak to me—it isn't true—it isn't true!"

The boy looked up. His face denied her words.

"Yes, I did it, mother," he said. "Don't take on so. I was tempted—I wanted to come home to you—I was tempted—and—mother—" the tears were channeling among the criss-cross wrinkles—"mother, don't take on!"

Then quickly he forced himself from her, turned to the detective, who was biting savagely at his mustache.

"Take me away—I can't bear to see her grieve so—take me up-stairs and let me pack my bag and get my coat!"

"Jennifer, take him up-stairs quickly," said John Budgeon. "Quickly, man, I say!" The grief of this woman, for certain reasons which had begun to become apparent to him, was more than he cared to watch.

"Yes, sir. Come along, Penberthy. Where's the staircase? Oh, I see—over there!"

Jennifer pushed the prisoner past him kindly, following him up the tiny staircase that wound out of this torture-chamber of a home. And the woman, her breast heaving, her eyes piteous, advanced to where he stood.

"I know you 'm had to do it," she said. "I know you 'm had to. You don't belong to be cruel—my brother was in the poliss—and I know. But——"

She faltered and forced herself to speak again.

"He's going with you—to prison—and—oh, you will make it light for him, you *will*, you *will!*"

"I—I'll do what I can," said John Budgeon—John Budgeon, who had never helped a prisoner these thirty years.

"Ah, I knew you would—I knew you would——"

Her voice went changing into thankfulness through her sobs.

"And you'll get him off for me—and send him back to me—you will—you will!"

And as she spoke—simply, naively, humanly, naturally—she set a floury hand upon each of the big empurpled cheeks of John Budgeon to whom, once, a woman on the east coast, with blue, sea-looking eyes like this woman's, had bidden farewell in kindred wise. And in the selfish fibers of him there flickered a gleam of that strange thing which men call sentimentality and which lurks, chiefly, in the hearts of the cruel and hard.

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"I'll do what I can," he said. "I promise you. I'll do what I can. Hullo, here they come. Please, Mrs. Penberthy, *please!*"

He gripped the wrists of the hands that rested upon his cheeks and thrust those hands away. He was just in time.

The prisoner descended. Jennifer followed behind. The prisoner carried a small brown bag. He was master of himself but exceeding pale. His mother, too, had herself in hand.

"Your coat, Jim," she said.

She ran to a peg, brought the garment, helped him on with it, put a white silk scarf about his neck. Then she turned to John Budgeon once more.

"Won't you let me put up some food for him and for y——"

"All right, mum. I'll see as he gets something to eat at Penzance. Come along, Penberthy, my lad." It was the detective who spoke now; he was only a subordinate but he had the prisoner in his charge.

"All right, sir. Good-by, mother. Cheer up. I don't suppose they'll give me much."

The boy's voice had a fictitious cheeriness; but his look belied the words. His mother came to him and kissed him, tenderly, passionately, motheringly, lovingly and long. The boy tore himself away; then rushed out of the now opened door. The detective imitated him. John Budgeon was following. Once more the mother stayed him. Again the floury forearms rested on his shoulders and each of the floury hands touched a cheek.

"Be good to him," she said. "Oh, be good to him. It isn't his fault. It's mine. I was proud of him an' his cleverness—an' I kept him from the fishing. An' I wanted to see him a gentleman in a black coat. This is God's judgment on the pride of me. An' *I* ought to go to prison, not him. But oh—" her voice, her eyes, were terrible and piteous—"oh, send him back to me! Make it light for him. Let him come home. And you'll write to me—from London—and tell me how he is!"

"I'll do what I can—and I'll write to you from London," said John Budgeon, and wondered if he heard his own voice. "But let me go, madam. Really—!"

The hands, the arms, fell from him; he was free to go as he desired. He went. Behind him, in the cottage, a woman was sitting at a table, sobbing her heart out, in the chair where her son had sat. John Budgeon shut the door sharply and strode out up the hill.

IN FRONT of him walked the detective and the widow's son. John Budgeon made no effort to catch up with them. Indeed, when the detective turned and waited with his prisoner he waved to him to go on. In this order they came to the Church Town at the top of the long steep hill. There John Budgeon joined them. The driver of the dog-cart stared.

"This gentleman will sit beside you, driver," said John Budgeon. "My friend and I will sit behind." The prisoner ascended obediently. John Budgeon joined Jennifer at the back.

"Penzance Railway Station—as hard as you like."

"Yes, sir!"

The dog-cart started, laboring under its load. The detective sat half-watching his prisoner, half-looking at his superior, who was giving instructions under his breath.

"You will take him to Bow Street in the usual way, Jennifer. Travel up by the 4.35. I'll follow by the 8.40—there's a sleeping car—and I shall join you at Bow Street about half-past ten."

"Yes, sir. I suppose you will get the solicitor to ask for a remand."

"No, I think not, if the magistrate agrees. It is——yes, to-morrow will be Saturday, and the Old Bailey sessions are on Monday and I should like to rush through the case at Bow Street in time to get it to the O. B. at once."

"But the witnesses, sir——"

"A bagatelle, Jennifer, a bagatelle. We have an admission. We shall want the depositor, Mr. Borlaze; we shall want the clerk who paid the warrant at Vere Street, and an official or two from the post-office savings-bank; and that's the lot. I shall go and see the postmaster of Penzance, send the necessary telegrams, and draft out their skeleton evidence before dinner at a hotel. I can't have the case coming on after Christmas—I am taking my daughter to Switzerland next week. I should have to come back to appear."

The detective assented admiringly. He had not been long attached to the post-office, but he had already learned how Mr. Budgeon had got on. Business, business

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methods, no time-wasting; ah, Mr. Budgeon was a proper, efficient man! He was silent while he thought of his superior. When he remembered the prisoner he spoke again, whispering very low.

"How much, sir?" He nodded meaningly at the figure beside the driver. "Nine months?"

John Budgeon did not answer. He was too busy with his thoughts. The detective ventured again:

"Of course, the Recorder *may* rap it in thick, sir—it's forgery, isn't it?—but Sir Forrest's a kind-hearted man."

Again there was no answer. The detective took the hint. John Budgeon, now no more interrupted, was thinking very hard. He was thinking of two incidents in his career. The first incident was this:

A boy, at the door of a cottage in East Anglia, was saying good-by to a woman with white hair and cheeks with many wrinkles and blue, sea-looking eyes and rough, weather-tanned cheeks. She put her arms round him—they were floury from a just-left bread-tub; she kissed him; she put floury hands upon his cheeks.

"Good-by, Johnnie," she said, and wept in the saying, as the tears made watercourses in the wrinkles. "Good-by, Johnnie. Be a credit to us. We've made a gentleman of you—we've put you into a black coat!"

That was the first incident. The other was recalled because he had remembered the first; it had been in the process of endeavoring to be a credit that the second had come about.

A clerk—in a black coat—in short, quite the gentleman—at the Norwich post-office counter — twenty - eight years before. "Change"—two pounds and some odd shillings—left on the counter by a customer—a business man who had bought stamps with a five-pound note. To the clerk, eager, aspiring, ambitious, the temptation to steal—that he might pay those fees for tuition by correspondence that he needed; the tuition that should help him to pass the examination which should secure him an appointment in London and pave the way to success.

The temptation—a succumbing—an actual pouching of the two pounds and the odd shillings; then its foregoing—not from virtue but fear. At the end of the day a reporting of the finding of the money; a handing over to his postmaster of the amount. And, next day, an application from the loser—who could identify the clerk by whom he had been served.

John Budgeon, sitting at the back of the dog-cart, shivered and glanced round. He had read little; he did not know the quotation, but his shudder, as he looked at the prisoner, expressed, all unconsciously, this thought:

"There—but for the grace of God—goes me!"

HE WAS still thinking, thinking, when he felt himself touched upon the sleeve. He started and looked quickly up.

"Excuse me, sir—" the detective spoke half apologetically—"but there's some white on you." He began a brushing movement. "That's better, sir. How the stuff does cling!"

"Thank you," said John Budgeon stiffly. "Thank you, Jennifer. It's all off now, I think. Thank you; thank you!" He drew his arm away.

Again there was silence. The dog-cart was being driven fast. They were free of the moorland; St. Buryan had long since been left behind. They dropped down, down, leaving Newlyn on their right; they went along the front toward Penzance. In the middle of the esplanade they passed a huge hotel. John Budgeon turned round.

"Stop here, driver!" he said.

The driver stopped. John Budgeon did not immediately descend.

"How much do I owe you?" he asked.

"A sovereign, sir."

The amount was reasonable. John Budgeon gave the man a coin. Then he tore a leaf from his pocket-book, took out his fountain pen, scribbled a bill that he might attach it to his traveling-claim as a voucher, and passed the driver a cheap stylo which he kept for such purposes alone. The driver scribbled a signature. John Budgeon dabbed it with a scrap of blotting-paper, took his bag from the detective and got down.

"Good day, driver," he said. "Good-by, Jennifer. I shall be at Bow Street by half-past ten."

He went into the hotel. It was out of season; the place was empty; an assiduous porter helped to remove his coat. There was white upon the collar and the shoulders;

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the porter, scenting a tip, called his attention to it, and began to brush.

John Budgeon swore.

Then he went into the writing-room, roughed out the evidence of the witnesses—a bagatelle to him, from long habit; he was half an Old Bailey lawyer by reason of his daily work. Then he went out. At the post-office he sent half a dozen telegrams, warning the witnesses whose evidence he had roughed. At a quarter to nine he was in the London train.

He took a berth in the sleeping-car; but his sleep was feverish and bad. Old memories were chasing in his head and mingling with fresh happenings; he was jumbling up two partings—yesterday's and the one of thirty years before. The thought of two pounds got fixed in his dreams, somehow: two pounds of somebody's money which he had got and which he meant to give up, and was asked why he had not. He had begun to mumble something, with a beating heart and a sinking inward sensation, and he had the knowledge that he was in prison, that somebody was coming to fetch him and that that somebody was actually at his bedside now.

He awoke with a gasp and a start. The attendant stood beside him, holding a cup of tea. John Budgeon took it, and began to dress.

He went to the hotel, bathed, breakfasted, drove to St. Martin's-le-Grand, conferred with the solicitor, received answers—satisfactory ones—to his telegrams, and, with the solicitor, took a cab.

AT BOW STREET the proceedings were brief. The magistrate committed for trial James Penberthy of Sennen, draper's assistant, incidentally—this did not appear in the depositions—threatened with phthisis and son of a widow who had wanted to make a gentleman of him and to put him into a black coat. And, as James Penberthy of Sennen vanished to the cells again, the clerk below the magistrate leaned over to the young solicitor where he sat with John Budgeon by his side.

"I suppose you're not in any hurry to get this into the Old Bailey on Monday. You see this is Saturday and it's rather rushing things. The depositions take some time to copy and——"

The young solicitor, very courteously, interposed.

"If you *could* manage to get the depositions through to-day, sir, we should be most obliged to you. Our principal witness, Mr. Budgeon, is taking his Christmas holidays in Switzerland and is anxious not to have to come back for the January sessions, you see."

"I see," said the clerk agreeably. He smiled at John Budgeon, whom he knew very well. "In that case I shall be pleased to meet you—most pleased!"

"Thank you, sir," said the young solicitor.

John Budgeon added his thanks; went back to the city; sat at his desk for perhaps an hour. He did exceedingly little work. He was too busy in striving against an inclination which was overmastering him, atom by bit. At last he gave up the fight.

"I see no harm in it," he assured himself—"no harm in it whatever. It is merely courteous. But of course the law must take its course." And he took note-paper and wrote:

DEAR MADAM:

According to my promise, I write to say that your son, whom I saw this morning for a few minutes, is very well.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN BUDGEON.

MRS. PENBERTHY,
Sennen, S. O.
Penzance, Cornwall.

He mailed the letter and went home to his house in Westcombe Park near the famous Rectory Field.

Blackheath was playing Cardiff. He went with his daughter, as a matter of course. She was a quite clever, rather metallic girl in her last year at the High School, and his forthcoming promotion would enable him to send her to Newnham. This had long been his ambition, for he was very proud of her and she was the one thing outside the official world for which he cared. But he was not happy; a canker gnawed at his heart. His daughter noticed it as they took tea, after the match.

"You don't seem happy, daddy," she wondered. "Is anything wrong at the office?"

"No, dear, no; nothing whatever," said John Budgeon. He spoke quite truthfully, too. There was nothing wrong at the office. But there was something terribly wrong in a little village near the Land's End. A widow-woman was weeping there—just as a widow-woman in East Anglia might have

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wept once if——John Budgeon did not care to pursue that side of it too far.

He tried to shake it from him; but his obsession grew greater, increased on Sunday, weighed him down, made him ill. On Monday he went to town. He was at the Old Bailey at eleven. By half-past he had been before the grand jury, where a true bill against James Penberthy was found. At twelve Jennifer came up to him in the waiting-room from the Court.

"He's been put up to plead, sir. He's pleaded 'Guilty,' of course. The Recorder's going to pass sentence on him and on the other P.-O. prisoners directly after lunch."

"That's all right," said John Budgeon. "That's all right."

And under his breath he added—to reassure himself—"The law must take its course!"

The constable retired again. John Budgeon sat on the waiting-room table, swinging a reflective leg. At one o'clock the whole building seemed to shake. It was Court, public, witnesses, barristers, going to lunch. John Budgeon stayed on alone. But it was in an East Anglian cottage, not in a London Assize Court, that he spent that fifty minutes—in an East Anglian cottage, where a widow-woman with criss-cross wrinkles and blue, sea-looking eyes was having speech with him in a room with a stone-slabbed floor.

Then suddenly he started; as suddenly he looked at his watch. It showed ten minutes to two.

"After all, it can't do any harm," he muttered. "It can't do any harm!"

He rose and hurried out, going along the corridor toward the room where the barristers robed. A policeman barred the way. John Budgeon revealed his identity—and two half-crowns changed hands. The policeman opened the door, leaned in, beckoned. A barrister appeared. He was the counsel who took all the post-office cases, and John Budgeon was *persona grata* with him; not unnaturally, since John Budgeon's industry was the cause of so many briefs.

"Hullo," he said cheerily; and he gave a little tug forward at his gown. "Hullo; what can I do for you?"

"I should like to speak to you a minute."

"By all means!"

The barrister crooked his arm in John Budgeon's and they walked up and down the corridor many times. At last the barrister paused by the robing-room door. "That's all?" he asked. "You are quite sure that is all?"

"Yes; quite sure, thank you!" was John Budgeon's reply.

The barrister nodded and disappeared. John Budgeon went round to the door of the Recorder's Court. He got in—he was known to the doorkeeper—and he sat down at the solicitor's table in the well of the Court. The Recorder entered. The Court rose. The Recorder bowed. The clerk of arraigns stood up to whisper to him; he nodded; the clerk turned round. The clerk spoke.

"Put up the post-office prisoners," he told the jailers. "James Penberthy first."

THERE was a moment's interval. All the Court looked at the dock. A haggard young man, in a shiny black morning coat, entered it and took his stand. The post-office counsel rose to state the nature of the case. Then he took an unusual tone.

"Having regard to the extreme youth and—er, ahem—ill-health of the prisoner, me lud—and to—er—the—er—extreme temptation under which the offense was er—committed—the prisoner was, in fact, starving, me lud—I am—the Post-Office, me lud, does not wish to press the case against the prisoner and will be glad if your ludship can see your way to deal with him as lightly as your ludship can. With this view—the Post-Office view, me lud—I should like to associate myself if your ludship will allow."

The barrister sat down. The Recorder, who had, once or twice, nodded gravely, leaned over his desk. The clerk of arraigns stood up. They whispered. Then the Recorder spoke:

"James Penberthy, you stand convicted, on your own confession, of forgery, an offense for which some years ago it would have been my duty to sentence you to transportation beyond the seas. Fortunately to-day the law allows me to exercise my discretion and to deal with you as I consider most fit. And, having regard to the exceptional circumstances of the case, I propose to deal with you lightly and in accordance with the wishes of the Post-Office in the matter—as expressed by counsel just now. You will be bound over in

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your own recognizances to come up for judgment if called upon. And I trust that this will be a warning to you all your life."

There was a hum of surprise and a commotion in the dock where a tall, haggard young man had fallen half-fainting into a warder's arms.

"A highly satisfactory sentence, Mr. Budgeon," said the post-office counsel.

"Highly satisfactory. Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Rossiter. Excuse me, I have to see the officer in the case."

John Budgeon made for the door again. Jennifer and other detectives were clustered round. Jennifer whispered his surprise.

"Bit unexpected, sir. I ——"

He stopped. Two gold coins had been pushed into his hand.

"Give 'em to the young fool," said John Budgeon. "No—no, take a ticket for him—see him into the 9.50 at Paddington—give him a meal first—and keep the change for yourself. I'm going home. I'm not feeling very well."

The detective gasped. John Budgeon pushed past him through the door. And he went straight to a telegraph-office. The telegram that he sent was this:

PENBERTHY, Sennen, Cornwall.
Your son is free. He comes to you by night train.
BUDGEON, St. Martin's-le-Grand.

Then he retreated, turning toward Cannon Street, walking very slowly; feeling jaded, shaken, tired and nervous and old—not wholly unreasonably, nor utterly without good cause.

For virtue had gone out of him—a thing which had never happened before.

THE CLUTCH of CIRCUMSTANCE

By Tarkington Baker

CHAPTER I

FATE AND THE DOCTOR

"GENTLEMEN," said Dr. Allen Reeves to the group in the club smoking-room, "some of us call it Fate, some call it Destiny, others name it Luck. But, call it whatsoever name one may select, we all of us agree that IT is a fact, though it eludes all the attempts at explanation and analysis that the wisest of us may make.

"I assume that we are all talking about the same thing—the strange fact that something beyond the control of the individual himself is concerned in the shaping of the issues of his life. Mr. Hayden, as he tells us, would have been a victim of the railroad-wreck to-day if he had not been

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so delayed by a congestion of traffic that he missed his train. It was an incident over which he had no control, yet it stepped in to save him.

"Suppose that Mr. Hayden, stopped by this traffic-congestion, had investigated its cause. Whither would his inquiries have led him? I can well imagine that he might have followed circumstance after circumstance, one growing naturally out of another from to-day to yesterday and from yesterday back into last year and thence still further back—back to Genesis—through a maze of incidents that are evidently without beginning and without ending.

"A few years ago, all this mysterious force was deeply impressed upon me by an attempt to follow a series of circumstances to the solution of a crime which seemed likely to go unsolved. To prove the controlling force of what I call the 'disconnected circumstance' let me recite the incidents, in the order in which they occurred:

CHAPTER II

DINKEY LEWIS STEALS A WATCH

IT WAS approaching two of the morning, and the morning was dark. The frost of late October was in the air, and the young man, whom I shall call "Dinkey" Lewis, wore the collar of his coat turned up and the brim of his soft hat pulled down. His face, as a result, was only partially visible, but it was not alone the bite of the first Autumn cold against which Dinkey sought to guard himself. There were worse things than cold.

At the street-corners, for instance, electric lights flared their illumination, and street-corners could not be avoided. Neither was it possible to avoid all chance pedestrians. These were few in number, to be sure, but the curious and heavy suspicion of the small hours of the night was in the glance of each. Passer-by scrutinized passer-by and, passing, turned a backward glance to complete the inspection. Dinkey knew by experience. And he proceeded on the theory that it was better to see than to be seen.

Alias "Slippery" and "Curly" Lewis, "The Kid," Brown, Black, Smith and Jones and other names too numerous to mention, Dinkey was occupying himself, as he made his way homeward, with thoughts that had to do directly with this parade of reliable, if conventional, pseudonyms, and more directly with his night's work.

The results of this had been gratifying, and to that fact mutely attested a roll of bills that nestled in his pocket where his left hand closed over it, gently and caressingly. Moreover, there was nothing in any other pocket, nothing at all about his person to lead any one to suspect that these bills had reposed, a few hours before, in the wallets of sundry gentlemen who had been intent on gaining positions of advantage at the final great political rally of the campaign, and who had been blissfully ignorant of the delicate handiwork of the young man who had seemed no more and no less eager than they.

His deft fingers had plied tirelessly and adroitly, and no mishap had attended their cautious and experienced explorations. And that, too, was a matter upon which he felt he might congratulate himself. Two years of hard labor were not calculated to make any one's fingers nimbler or more supple, but he had found to his satisfaction that his own had lost little of their cunning.

BILLS, reflected Dinkey—they were the things. No more watches, no more pins for him. Purses in hip-pockets were far less hazardous than jewelry. With jewelry, one ran risks. Had not a watch been the means of his undoing? This fact, indeed, he had pondered in prison and, in moments that were especially conducive to meditation, he had reviewed his career in detail, to have the conclusion finally forced upon him that even the slight degree of safety which the light-fingered gentry of his profession might reasonably depend upon was to be found in confining their expert activities to hard coin and actual currency..

And, while it pleased those good souls who concern themselves with the reform of men behind the bars to believe that Number 25421—in which array of figures was temporarily buried Dinkey's identity—was meditating upon the evil of his ways, he was, in fact, devising a new "system" of operations, based upon this conclusion, to be practised upon his release.

It excluded jewelry. And to-night's experience, as he viewed it, had vindicated his judgment. He had done well; he had

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succeeded beyond his expectations, and it was very comforting, moreover, to reflect that he had ahead of him none of the danger that lurks in dealings with "fences." There was no bargaining to be done, no bartering, no haggling. He had the money itself.

A sound caught Dinkey's ear. Instantly he was alert, and instantly, too, the thoughts of the moment went scurrying out of mind, driven forth in the immediate preparation for any exigency that might arise. He listened, not with his ears alone, but with every sense and every faculty brought to their assistance. His bland, frank, boyish face showed no change. His hands did not move a hair's breadth in his pockets. His pace was unaltered.

But every nerve and muscle were tense and his feet fell noiselessly. The sound had suggested a smothered scream—a woman's scream. Too faint, as it was borne to him, to be identified, he listened for its repetition. Then, with his mind thus keenly open to every impression conveyed to it, he became aware of something singularly familiar in his surroundings.

They were connected, somehow, with some incident in his own life. He probed for it, digging deep into the memory that seldom failed him, and found it, and the shadow of a smile flickered about the corners of his mouth.

Three years before, in an attempt to alight from a rapidly moving car, he had stumbled and fallen. It was in Winter, during the rush of six-o'clock traffic, and dark. The frozen surface of the street had betrayed him, and a jagged lump of ice had laid his scalp open. It was nothing to make a fuss over, but a sympathetic bystander had helped him. The bystander never dreamed that the victim of the accident had made his flying leap into darkness and disaster because an individual on the crowded rear platform had begun to fumble prematurely for a wallet that had passed mysteriously and permanently out of his possession. So the good Samaritan insisted on leading the bleeding Dinkey to the office of a doctor in the apartment-house he was now approaching.

There it was, on his right, across the alley. Dinkey had protested, but the stranger, attributing the protest to the disorder of a brain that had been rudely jarred, was firm in his insistence and, as further refusal operated only to attract others to the scene, meek submission to the Samaritan's kindly despotism had been obligatory. On the way, though, he had managed to transfer the contents of the purloined purse to his pocket and to dispose of the purse itself. He had gone on then, inwardly cursing, but somewhat reassured.

Then the Doctor had come—Dr. Elizabeth Brander. Dinkey recalled her clearly. It was his first encounter with a woman physician. Dr. Brander was not daintily feminine. Indeed, she was hardly attractive. She was tall and angular, with a face that seemed gentle enough but certainly not beautiful. Still, she was a woman and Dinkey had felt, instinctively, that it was decidedly ungallant procedure on his part to bring his bleeding head for her to mend.

But she had stitched the cut skilfully and tenderly. Dinkey knew! He had undergone sundry other stitchings in his day. And he had paid her—grinning as he did so—with a five-dollar bill that had but lately belonged elsewhere.

He had no idea of its denomination when he drew it from his pocket. It was one of three. Suppose it had been a thousand!—— Well, no matter; she'd taken it, and returned him three silver dollars in change, and he had gone on his way.

THE sound that had arrested Dinkey's attention was not repeated. It was the cry of some one, he concluded, to whom sleep was bringing no pleasant dreams and, in common with those who walk abroad much in the small hours of the morning, he was accustomed to things of the sort and gave it no further heed. He was midway across the alley, looking, if he was conscious of looking for anything at all, for a sign in Dr. Brander's window.

One ought to be there. He remembered it vaguely. Yes, there it was. In the uncertain light, he could make out the glint of the gilt edging, though he could not discern the letters. He wondered whether it was still her sign. He'd make sure when he got nearer.

Absorbed in the recollections, Dinkey did not observe the man who, at this moment, with his face turned backward, suddenly emerged from the darkness of the alley-mouth. Nor did the man see Dinkey.

The latter was still walking with the cat-like tread he had unconsciously assumed a

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few moments before. The stranger was treading similarly, but with greater haste than Dinkey. And, it might be remarked, even to the discredit of Dinkey's keenness of hearing, with less success.

They collided. Immediately, rising to meet the emergency, habit asserted itself with Dinkey. It rallied to his rescue, took him in hand and directed his procedure. Aside from the hoarse outward rush of his breath as the stranger catapulted into him, Dinkey's lips emitted no sound.

His hands withdrew suddenly from his pockets and lifted upward instinctively to ward off the impact of the collision, yet, quickly as they moved, they failed of their purpose. But, as the right hand came abreast of the man's waist, the fingers felt the touch of cold metal. They closed over it. They obeyed, without mental command, the training of years. And, the very moment when the impact ended and the recoil began, there slipped from the left-hand pocket of the stranger's waistcoat and into the right-hand pocket of Dinkey's coat a watch and fob!

Alas for the resolution laboriously evolved from the deliberation of two dreary years of imprisonment! Alas for the congratulations of a few minutes before! The habit begot of long practise held him in its grip. It had shown no judgment, no discrimination. It had served him not wisely, but too well.

He was, in short, a victim of his own proficiency. The watch and fob reposed in Dinkey's pocket before he was himself clearly aware that the transfer had been effected. Then the fact dawned on him suddenly.

"——!" he muttered, beneath his breath.

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger.

He referred, of course, to the collision.

"'S all right," responded Dinkey, hoarsely.

As a result of the encounter, his hat had slipped lower over his eyes. He was glad of this so far as it served to conceal his own features from view, but he regretted it in a sense, too, because he could catch no glimpse of the features of the other. The stranger, as a matter of fact, quickly averted his face and further hid it from sight by the immediate use of a handkerchief.

"My fault," he continued.

"No one's," contributed Dinkey, shortly, and moved on.

OUT of the corner of his eye he observed that the stranger crossed the street and lost himself in the denser darkness on the other side. Dinkey's own way led him toward the corner and directly under the arc-light. He did not dare, under the circumstances, to alter his course. He kept on, hastening his pace a little, and, gaining the crossing, turned, walked a few steps and then broke into a run.

He ran silently, cautiously, swiftly. At the next corner, he turned again. At the third, he turned once more. By this time his mind had regained its poise and, asserting its supremacy, counseled him to reduce his speed. He resumed walking.

At the same moment, his fingers began a careful and systematic exploration of the watch itself and, as they skilfully searched its surface, there came a sudden muffled tinkle from his pocket. The watch struck two.

"A repeater," he assured himself, and then fell to considering the problem brought to him when it passed into his possession.

What was to be done with it?

He was reasonably sure the owner had little cause to suspect how he had parted with it. Indeed, Dinkey himself could scarcely realize how it had come from the stranger's pocket into his own. But, even so, nothing was further from Dinkey's mind than any intention to dispose of it in the usual manner. Habit might play him a mean trick—as it had—but that fact afforded no reason for assuming the risk involved in selling the watch. That much of his "system" at least would be observed.

Still, there was the chance that the owner, believing the timepiece had been lost, would advertise in the hope of recovering it and, in that event, Dinkey could be rid of the incubus and profit himself at the same time.

There was the solution, he concluded—return it for a reward. Nothing could be simpler; nothing safer.

He considered the matter until he reached home—a furnished room, lately rented, situated in a comparatively respectable neighborhood fairly well removed from Dinkey's old haunts, and selected in accord with another phase of the revision of his "system" that had gone on day and night in prison. He tiptoed to his door, opened it noiselessly and closed it silently behind him. He struck a match, saw that the blinds were lowered and switched on the electric light.

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Twenty minutes later, his clothes were neatly folded on a chair. In his vest pocket were two five-dollar bills and two ones. Successfully concealed elsewhere about the room was the balance—a sum-total of $137. It had been the most profitable night in his whole career and, he reflected, a little wofully, long, lean years probably would pass before another single night's work would yield a similar amount.

HOWEVER, that was a matter for the future to take care of. Just now his especial concern was the watch. It was of foreign make, with massive gold case, and, on the back, two initials were engraved—C. Z. The fob, too, was of value. It was curiously wrought and evidently of a workmanship of many years ago. An heirloom, thought Dinkey, and he found comfort in the idea. It made the advertisement of the loss and the offer of a reward practically certain.

Hence, to Dinkey's mind, an article like this might rank next to actual currency itself in desirability.

He removed the bottom drawer from his dresser and, underneath, on the inside, some three inches above the floor, into the wood of the front base-board, he cautiously inserted a pin. On this he suspended the watch. He replaced the drawer, set his cheap alarm-clock for seven—for to lie abed late, however sleepy he might be, would only arouse suspicion—switched off the light, and went to bed.

He selpt heavily and tranquilly, like a laborer after a hard day's work. Dinkey's conscience never kept him awake—at least, as yet.

In relating these incidents, I hope to emphasize the fact that it was clearly an unforeseen circumstance which possessed the pickpocket of the stranger's watch. There was no intention in the theft. As a matter of fact, the intention was *not* to steal a watch. A few hours earlier, while he was purloining purses, young Lewis had deliberately passed by numerous opportunities to steal timepieces, only to find himself, a little later, at a time when he had not meant to steal at all, guilty of what was obviously the involuntary theft of a watch. He was, in other words, the victim of habit and of circumstance. And circumstance, as a controlling-agent, remained with him in the adventures that next befell him.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF DR. ELIZABETH BRANDER

SOME five hours later, at eight o'clock, Miss Alice Carey, office-assistant to Dr. Elizabeth Brander, inserted her key in the door of her employer's apartment, released the latch and entered. Also, at this moment, Dinkey Lewis, well-groomed, shaved, and looking none the worse for his loss of sleep, with his mind still occupied with the event of the earlier morning, turned the corner one block away—the same corner, he recalled, that he had rounded with no mean speed a few hours before.

Dr. Brander did not greet Miss Carey, nor was Miss Carey expecting to be greeted. For a month now, the Doctor had occupied every leisure moment in research-work. She had toiled early and late in her little laboratory, or bent, silent and tireless, over her microscope.

She had volunteered little information aside from the fact that she believed she was on the point of an important discovery—something that had to do with germs. Miss Carey was hazy, but interested. She knew vaguely that, if Dr. Brander succeeded, the medical profession would gain another curative agent similar to the vaccine remedy for typhoid, or diphtheria, or whatever it was that was cured by deceased germs. She shuddered at the thought. Of course, she was not sure. As Dr. Brander had told her, she was not possessed of the scientific mind. But it was a big thing, anyway, and it would mean an end to some infantile malady—she couldn't recall precisely what—as well as tremendous personal distinction to Dr. Brander.

And now, when it seemed her search was nearing an end, the Doctor had labored with new enthusiasm, an enthusiasm that knew no bounds. She was becoming thin and haggard.

"It's so nearly done," she had said in answer to Miss Carey's mild protests against her overworking, "that I must finish before I rest. Think of it!" she had added. "Some one else, somewhere, may be only an hour behind me, and if I pause —— Well, you see," she finished lamely, "I just can't!"

So Miss Carey, having done what she conceived to be her duty, had said no more.

Now, on entering, she threw aside her

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wraps and made her way to the laboratory. Dr. Brander was not there.

"She has worked late," thought Miss Carey, "and overslept."

So she proceeded to the door leading to Dr. Brander's little bedroom.

It was slightly ajar. She knocked. There was no reply. She knocked a second time. Still there was no reply. She called, gaily at first, then a little more vigorously, then a little more seriously and a little more insistently.

But no sound came from behind the door. Miss Carey pushed it open and entered. She walked toward the bed, glanced over the foot-board and retreated in horror.

The body of Dr. Brander, attired in a dressing-gown—one she wrapped about her when suddenly called from her slumber by the sound of the telephone-bell—lay atop the bedclothing. A gaping wound showed in the throat, and the bedding, where the head reposed, was soaked in blood.

MISS CAREY staggered from the room, made her way stumblingly to the outer door, gained the main hallway of the apartment-house, reeled to the entrance and stood in the doorway, gasping. Her voice died in her throat. Her cries made strange little noises, but her lips, somehow, were shut against their escape.

It was precisely at this instant that Dinkey's eyes were turned toward the apartment entrance. He observed Miss Carey's sudden appearance. He observed her agitation. He paused. Still speechless, the girl beckoned to him. He hesitated a moment, saw her sway and catch herself and then came suddenly to her side.

"In there!" she gasped, pointing to the open door.

She clutched his arm and forced him toward the entrance to Dr. Brander's apartment.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Help!" she managed to respond. "Quick, quick!"

Half guided and half propelled by Miss Carey, Dinkey gained the reception-room. The girl pointed to the door of the bedroom. He made for it a little cautiously. At the threshold, he paused, turning toward her for further suggestion. Miss Carey motioned him on, and he stepped inside, his eyes resting on the sight that had disclosed itself a few moments before to the startled vision of Dr. Brander's office-assistant.

A single glance sufficed to acquaint Dinkey with the gruesome nature of the room's contents.

"Who is it?" he asked.

The girl did not answer. He pressed forward for a closer view.

"It's Dr. Brander," he said.

Miss Carey, visible through the doorway, nodded assent. Suddenly she found her voice.

"What shall I do?" she wailed.

"She's dead," Dinkey announced, solemnly and with lowered voice, half to himself.

"I know," the girl answered. "I found her—just now—so. What shall I do?"

There was something in the mystery of the tragedy that fascinated Dinkey. There were things he wanted to know; things he wanted to find out. He moved quickly, his eyes taking in every detail, the facts photographing themselves on his memory.

He saw the wound in the throat, and something about it perplexed him. He studied it a moment and shook his head. He stepped closer, looking for a weapon. There was none in sight. He gazed about the room. There was no weapon to be seen.

"She's been murdered," he said to himself. But he was not sure.

The furniture was in order. The drawers of a dresser were closed. The Doctor's clothes hung neatly in a closet. Nothing at all had been disturbed. He sought evidence of robbery, but none was to be found. A watch, a pin, some keys, some change, all lay in plain sight on the dresser-top, and a diamond ring added luster to the collection. It was apparent, too, that the bed had not been occupied. The cover that dressed it daintily for daytime-display had not been removed.

On this the body lay and, aside from the wound in the throat, the body itself bore no other mark of violence save a small cut in the left forearm. It was a posterior wound, as we doctors call it, which means that it was on the side of the arm opposite to the palm of the hand. It caught and held Dinkey's attention and, quite as a matter of fact—so calmly, indeed, that he was surprised at his own lack of excitement—he bent closer and examined it.

It was a deep, clean cut, no more than an inch in length, and midway between the

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wrist and the elbow. Something about it struck him as unusual, strange, even impossible. He examined the left hand, then the right. There was no blood on either.

He turned his attention again to the wound in the throat. He observed that the bedclothing, where the head rested, was wet and red with blood, but, singularly enough, though he made close inspection of the walls, of the floor, of the end of the dresser which adjoined the bed, nowhere else was blood to be seen—no drops, no splotches.

Once more his eyes sought the wound in the arm and, as he studied it, gradually it came to him why it seemed strange. It was bloodless!

"What shall I do?" the girl demanded again.

He thought a moment.

"Has she any relatives?" he inquired.

"Only a sister—Miss Brander," she replied

"Well," directed Dinkey, "use the 'phone—call her. Tell her to come at once, but," he added hastily, "don't tell her what's happened."

THE girl picked up the telephone and Dinkey continued his investigation. A bathroom adjoined Dr. Brander's bedroom, and he entered. He examined the wash-basin and the bath-tub, only to find that both were dry and clean. He drew his finger over the surface of the bowl of the lavatory. There was dust on it. He returned to the bed and once more searched for a weapon. And once more his search was without result. He heard Miss Carey talking to Miss Brander.

"Yes," said Miss Carey, "Come at once; it's serious—very—very!"

Dinkey looked again at the wound in the throat. He shook his head.

"Emptied like a bottle," he muttered to himself. "Just like a bottle."

He stood pondering the matter until Miss Carey's voice again interrupted him.

"What now?" she said.

"Did you find a knife or—or—anything like that?" he inquired.

"No. I didn't look," she answered.

He was silent.

"What now?" she persisted.

She seemed dazed, almost helpless, moving as if in a dream. Her eyes were vacant and expressionless, fastened upon Dinkey, fixed upon him. She reminded him of a girl he had once seen who had been put to sleep by a vaudeville hypnotist.

"Call the police," he said, shortly.

She did not move, and he repeated the command. Mechanically, then, she obeyed by resuming her telephoning, and Dinkey passed again into the bathroom.

A door led thence into an adjoining room and he found himself in the doctor's laboratory. He passed through still another door and came into a small kitchen. A third door attracted his attention; it was locked with a night-lock and he turned the bolt, opened the door and stood looking out into the mouth of the alley where he had collided with the stranger earlier in the morning.

The realization forced itself on him with a shock. He closed the doors, saw the latch catch again and returned to Miss Carey.

"The police are coming," she said.

The police! The announcement was like a dash of cold water in Dinkey's face. Somehow, for a moment, he had looked upon the police as allies—for the first time in years. Now it came to him, abruptly, that they were still his enemies, always his enemies; that he must run from them, elude them, give ground before them, slink away at their approach. He bore the brand of the known criminal. He was outlaw, pariah—to be suspected, contradicted, unbelieved.

If he were found by the police in the Brander apartment he would be arrested. The explanation of his presence, simple and convincing as it was, would not be accepted, coming from his lips. The stamp of the prison was on him. He would be locked up, questioned, grilled for hours. His answers would be twisted and turned against him, distorted, misinterpreted.

Ah, he knew the game! And last night? What would he say about last night? With his criminal record, with his photograph in the rogues' gallery, suppose they forced him to admit his presence, at a suspicious hour, in the vicinity of a house where mysterious death had come suddenly and horribly, suggesting murder. What would he say then? What would they *let* him say? He would be unable to say truthfully how he came to be there. That would reveal his own transgressions. And to lie about it would only draw the net tighter about him.

He saw in a moment the gravity of his situation and consternation seized him.

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"Why, he reflected, "they could send me to the chair! They'd do it; they'd frame it up!"

"Miss Brander is coming."

Miss Carey stood at the window, peering out.

"She's turning the corner," she added, her voice faint and hollow. She was still dazed.

A moment later Miss Brander appeared; a tall gaunt woman, almost mannish in appearance. She was breathless from running and her agitation, thought Dinkey, was in strange contrast to everything she suggested.

"Oh, what is it, what is it?" she cried, rushing to Miss Carey.

"It's the Doctor—— Miss Brander!"

The girl gave way for the first time to tears.

"What, what?" demanded Miss Brander.

Neither noticed Dinkey.

"She's—she's dead!" wailed Miss Carey.

However masculine Miss Brander may have appeared to be, only the eternal feminine made itself evident now. Her tears were added to those of the girl and it was the gentler, younger Miss Carey who, in the trial of the moment, soothed the other. And she seemed to gain from her ministrations both strength and courage. She was trying to explain, to impart her explanation gently. She spoke in broken sentences, and Miss Brander's sobs hid the words.

Dinkey's own eyes, for a second, clouded over, and a lump rose in his throat. He turned away, with a little gesture of resignation, of finality, and stepped through the open door into the hallway. No one was in sight. He looked back toward the Doctor's flat, whence there still came to him the moaning of Miss Brander, and then—he departed.

Behind him, in the distance, he heard the clang of a gong. He shrugged his shoulders and continued on his course.

"That watch," he muttered to himself, "struck two."

CHAPTER IV

FATE TAKES CONTROL

YOU will still observe that circumstance remained in control of the situation. It began, however, to make itself more than ever apparent from the moment that Dinkey Lewis left the Brander apartment. He went, in accordance with a plan formed weeks before—and wholly without connection with the incidents of the day—to call upon a young woman. This, of course, he might have done the preceding day, or any day, for that matter, of the three weeks that had passed since he had been released from prison.

But the day before, you will recall, Dinkey was not the proud possessor of a hundred dollars. That made a difference. Back in prison, he had added to his "system" something more than the mere prohibition against jewelry. Indeed, he had attached a condition—a condition which, in turn, concerned itself with the probability of a well-filled pocketbook—and upon this condition his "system" was, in truth, based.

"If," he repeated to himself a thousand times, and, with each repetition, he had surrounded it on all sides with the name of Mabel Sanders. In common with all who live outside the law, he had an abiding faith in chance, and chance, in Dinkey's case, was to find embodiment in the person of Mabel Sanders. With conditions favorable—which depended on Mabel herself—he might be moved to make his livelihood in the future by means other than those he had employed in the past.

With money enough in hand to supply his wants while he made the fight, regardless of the money's source, Dinkey had planned to attempt reform, at least, if Mabel lent him the proper encouragement. It would rest with her. And this very day he had meant to breakfast leisurely, call at the jewelry-shop where she worked—*that* would be a test, indeed, he grimly told himself—and diplomatically, without disclosing his motive or his purpose, draw from Mabel some idea as to what hope the future might hold.

Despite the tragedy of the morning, he followed his program. At ten o'clock, therefore, wearing a smile that bespoke the possession of a sense of humor, he entered the jewelry-shop of one Morris Groff and found Miss Sanders in sole and complete charge.

She recognized him promptly.

"William Morton Lewis!" she cried, and there was the warmth of hearty and cordial welcome in her tones.

The sound of his real name, and of the whole of it, was pleasing in Dinkey's ears.

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It whirled him back to other years when, in the callowness of his teens, he had resented this style of address.

He smiled at the recollection. It was Mabel's form of greeting in the old days. She had plagued him with it, laughing at his requests to adopt a style more in keeping, as he had believed, with the reputation he was rapidly gaining and diligently cultivating with the rank and file of the Curran gang.

He had much preferred any one of his nicknames, but Mabel's only compromise had been to call him "Willie," which was worse. Now, however, especially from her lips, no salutation could have had more agreeable form.

"Say it again!" he urged.

She laughed, in the old, whole-hearted way characteristic of her—and repeated it.

"I thought maybe you wouldn't know me," he said lamely.

"Of course I know you," she replied.

Dinkey meant to present the matter fairly.

"I mean," he added, "that maybe you wouldn't *want* to know me."

"WILLIE," she said seriously, "it isn't what's been. It's what's goin' to be that counts. You've had your lesson, you've paid, you've—you've——"

"Served time," he finished for her; "been in prison. You might as well say it."

She nodded.

"And now," she continued, "you're beginning again. You're out; you're free. It's up to you."

He was silent.

"Didn't you learn anything up there?" she questioned.

"Oh, I learned all right," he said bitterly. "How to nail hoops on barrels! Mabel," he became desperately serious, "I wouldn't nail another hoop on another barrel of my own accord for a thousand dollars a hoop."

"Of course you wouldn't," she agreed. "You can do better things than that. You're clever, Willie."

He shook his head.

"I guess not," he said.

"Yes," she insisted. "Why, you can do wonderful things with those hands of yours."

He looked up quickly.

"Oh," she went on. "I didn't mean that. You know I didn't. I want you to be square. Aren't you smart enough to make good in the right way?"

"You mean some honest way?"

"Yes."

"I've never tried. I'm just a sort o' fox—no good, I reckon."

"It's not my business, Willie. Only, I like you. I always have, an' I never believed you were really bad. I don't believe it now. We've always been good friends, ever since we were little kids together, haven't we?"

"Yes," he assented "till——"

"An' even then," she added, hastily. "I didn't go back on you even then, Willie. But I wasn't sorry it happened. I was really glad. I thought it'd make you or break you an'—well, I didn't think it'd break you. But it's up to you."

He made no reply.

"I was thinkin' about it the other night," she continued, "I was at the theater——"

"I wish *I* could take you to the theater," he broke in, wistfully.

"You can, Willie, when you *want* to."

He reflected a moment.

"You mean," he asked, "that I won't *want* to till I'm straight?"

"Yes," she answered simply, "till you're straight."

"I s'pose you're right; yes, you're right."

They were silent.

"Listen here!" She ended the pause suddenly. "We went to vaudeville an' there was a fellow there, Willie, who did tricks—sleight-o'-hand—with cards an' tumblers an' things like that. He reminded me of you. Do you remember the tricks you used to do? Why, Willie, yours were better'n his—a good deal better. An' he's on the stage an' he gets a hundred dollars a week. Think of it! You could do that."

"I *was* pretty good, wasn't I?"

"Better'n him, Willie; a whole lot."

"I made up some of 'em, Mabel. They were my own."

Something deep in his heart was stirring. An honest pride in an honest work well done was lifting its head.

"Tricks? Pshaw, Mabel; I *dream* 'em," he continued, "I used to lie awake—up there—an' plan 'em. Brand-new ones." He was waxing enthusiastic. "They let me have a pack o' cards, an' I practised, too."

The enthusiasm forsook him.

"But what's the use?" he asked. "Look

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what I am. Do you s'pose they'd take—me?"

"You can get away from the past, Willie," she said.

"Can I? No, Mabel, you don't know the game. Every bull in the city is reachin' for me with both hands. I'm marked. If I go to work, what'd they do? They'd hunt me up; they'd find me; they'd ask questions, talk to my boss, tell him my record. Then what? Kicked out, that's what'd it'd be—kicked out. An' if I'd get another job, why, it'd be the same thing over again. It ain't no use. I know!"

"But you're startin' all over, Willie."

"Do you reckon they'd *let* me? Not for a minute, Mabel. No. They've got it on me an' that—that settles it."

"I don't believe it! I won't believe it!" she protested, with the finality of the feminine that has conviction without argument.

"LOOK here," he persisted. "The whitest detective on the force is old Larry Corrigan. He's known me since I was a kid. He knows you an' you know him. He's got sense and he's got feelin'. But if he walked in this door an' saw me standin' here in this jewelry-shop, he'd order me out. He'd prob'ly send me in, too—just on suspicion. He'd frisk me, to make sure I wasn't gettin' 'way with half your stock. You see, once they've got you, they've always got you."

"No." She shook her head. "It ain't true. I can't tell why, maybe, but it just ain't so. It's not *right*, an'—well, it can't be so. You've wiped the slate clean an' if you make 'em understand that, they've got to let you alone. But you have to show 'em; you have to show 'em. You have to make 'em *believe* it."

"How?" The smile broke again, boyish and winning.

"I don't know. But you've got to stand your ground; stop bein' afraid of 'em, quit runnin' away from 'em. Why can't you do something," she asked with sudden inspiration, "that'll show 'em you're lined up on the right side?"

"Peach?"

She thought about it.

"No-o-o," she said, a little doubtfully. "You can't go back on a pal. But there's a way, Willie; there always is. You'll have to find it. An' I hope you do; I really hope you do. You will, too, if you want to. An' Willie—listen! When you come an' ask me, I'll go to the theater with you."

He moved a step in her direction. She held out her hand.

"Good-by," she said, softly. "Don't forget—when you ask me. It's up to you."

SOME two hours later, Sergeant Larry Corrigan found himself assuring Miss Mabel Sanders that any ex-convict who disclosed an inclination toward honest living could always depend on his encouragement, at least.

"Philanthropizin', ye air, Miss Mabel?" he questioned.

"No," she answered. "I've been told that a man who serves time in prison and tries to work when he's released is dogged by the police till he has to go back to his crooked ways in order to live."

"It depends on the man," he said. "Now, if you'd tell me who you had in mind——"

"I'll not, sergeant."

His cunning was checkmated, but the girl's questions and her frank refusal to supply any information set him to thinking. He was uneasily conscious of trying to remember something. She suggested it, but the substance eluded him. Suddenly, however, there flashed before his mind's eye a picture of a boy and girl. They lived in his neighborhood; they grew up there. He saw them together, happy, laughing, carefree.

"By the way, Miss Mabel," he said, as though the information were of no value, "did ye know there's an old friend o' yours back in the city?"

Her eyes were looking straight into his and something he saw there made him pause. His own responded with a quick gleam of understanding. He smiled.

"It's fine October wither, Miss Mabel," he added.

"It is, Sergeant Corrigan."

"An' good day to ye an'—ye might tell him for me that I'm his friend, too. Good luck."

Sergeant Corrigan, being a man of keen discernment and nice judgment, turned on his heel and departed.

That afternoon, Dinkey Lewis was a close observer of the performance of the Mysterious Creighton, magician and prestidigitator. He appraised the act fairly.

"You're better'n him," Mabel had said. Well, was he? With the cards, perhaps,

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but, unfortunately where Dinkey had been sojourning for two years, juggling with glassware, cutlery, silk hats, silver coins and goldfish had not been encouraged.

Still, on the whole, the keen-eyed spectator in the first row in the second seat from the center aisle was not discouraged. He made up his mind to practise. And, thoughtful and preoccupied, he emerged from the Olympic to find himself face to face with Larry Corrigan.

"DINKEY," said the Sergeant, "I'll have a word with ye!"

Dinkey was silent. He permitted himself to be withdrawn from the path of traffic and turned into a side street. Where the excursion thus begun was to end, or where, or how, Dinkey had no means of knowing. He was in the hands of Corrigan and Fate.

The sergeant stopped.

"Are ye workin', Dinkey?" he asked.

"I'm goin' to," he replied.

"Well, my lad, get at it!"

Corrigan looked him over. It was a searching appraisement and he took his time about it.

"I was passin' a certain jewelry-shop this afternoon, Dinkey."

Dinkey looked up.

"An' I wint in," the sergeant continued, his eyes fixed on Dinkey's, "an' a certain young lady there asked me why a man that's just out o' prison ain't given a fair deal. I told her, Dinkey, that it rests with the man. You're a clever lad. You're far too smart, me boy, to go back where ye came from. D'ye understand? An' ye *will* go back if ye're up to the old thricks again. Ye can't beat the game; no one ever does. Ye'll fall sooner or later. Do ye attind me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I knew yer father an' yer mother, Dinkey, an' I'm talkin' to ye for the sake o' me old neighbors. Get right an' go straight."

"How'll I get right?"

"Show ye're on the square, me lad."

Corrigan held out his hand, a big red, rough, muscular hand.

"I'm yer friend, Dinkey. Don't turn me down."

And for the second time that same day—and it might have been the hundredth, for that matter—Sergeant Corrigan proved himself to be an excellent judge of human nature. Dinkey was suddenly aware that the responsibility he was trying to evade, to shift to other shoulders, was fixed heavily and firmly on his own. It was, as Mabel had said, up to him. His hand met Corrigan's and clasped it.

CHAPTER V

A BOWL OF GOLDFISH

I HAVE wandered somewhat from the tragedy that had robbed Dr. Elizabeth Brander of life, but I have gone no farther afield than the pursuit of circumstances demanded. The apparently trivial incidents I have related are links in the chain and, as I have looked back upon them at various times, I have felt convinced that the chain itself would never have been completed without them, or without any one of them. Yet none, as you will observe, seemed to have even a remote bearing on the tragedy itself. Each was extraneous and, on its face at least, wholly immaterial.

Dinkey Lewis himself, though he might have been vaguely aware that evening as he sat down to his dinner that his visit to Mabel, his subsequent visit to the theater and the still later talk with Corrigan were all combining to affect his own immediate future, could never have imagined that these, in turn, were also to associate themselves presently with the Brander affair.

He opened the evening papers to learn that Dr. Brander's death occupied front-page space. It was "baffling;" it was "wrapped in mystery;" it "defied solution;" it was "an unreadable riddle." So the head-lines put it, and so, evidently, the newspapers viewed it. But the police, it seemed, entertained a different opinion. They pronounced it suicide. And Dinkey read the verdict with amazement.

"They're stallin'," he commented to himself.

But, Dinkey's opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, the detectives argued suicide. To be sure, no weapon had been found, but neither was there evidence to confirm a theory of murder. Investigation had failed to disclose the slightest motive for murder. Nothing in the apartment had been disturbed; nothing was missing.

Obviously it was not the work of a burglar—the doors and windows had been found closed and locked. Dr. Brander's

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life had been one of ceaseless toil and study. She had few acquaintances and fewer friends. Those who knew her admired her skill, her devotion to her profession, her application to her work and her ambition to succeed. She was not an attractive woman. No romance had penetrated the dull gray of her life to color it with brighter hues. Jealousy could not have dictated the crime and a lovers' quarrel was altogether out of the question.

Then, again, no one had been seen in the vicinity of the apartment. No one had been seen to enter it. Occupants of surrounding flats had heard no sound of struggle. Yet Dr. Brander was unusually robust and powerful physically for a woman—a fair match, as a matter of fact, for the ordinary man—and it was inconceivable that she could not have made some vigorous outcry before her throat had been cut.

Thus was the theory of the murder disposed of. What remained? Suicide, to be sure. And in support of that theory the police accumulated evidence quickly and readily.

Dr. Brander had been working too hard. She was nervous, irritable; she lived too much alone; she was too deeply absorbed in her work. It was work that brought no appreciable financial returns and the few patients who consulted her were scarcely enough in number to afford her more than a bare existence. She had sought laboratory-employment in a medical college and had failed to obtain the appointment. She was in debt, even in arrears to her office-assistant. She had exhibited signs of despondency. Then, further, she had met her death between one and two o'clock in the morning—the medical testimony adduced the fact—and she had not been abed, despite the fact that she had prepared herself to retire for the night.

The conclusion was obvious. She had worked late. She had become, perhaps, more than usually discouraged as a result of this labor, and, seized with sudden melancholy, she had impulsively decided to end all and had cut her own throat.

The failure of the police to produce the knife seemed to be the only flaw in the argument. But even this the police swept aside. They pointed to the fact that it was a tenet of the religious faith of Miss Brander, of the office-assistant, and even of Dr. Brander herself, that those who die by their own hand can not lie in consecrated ground. To save the wretched woman from this last and final calamity, Miss Brander or Miss Carey, or both together, had concealed the weapon.

They denied it, of course. Would they remove the knife for such reason and then admit it? How ridiculous! The detectives shrugged their shoulders. It was as much as to say, in the words of Dr. Johnson: "We have found you an argument; we are not obliged to find you an understanding!"

The mystery was cleared; the incident was closed.

AND closed, indeed, it might have been and might have remained had it not been for the circumstances that had befallen Dinkey Lewis. Pondering what he read, that young man at first felt some doubt in his own mind regarding the missing weapon. He had never heard of the prohibition resting against the body of a person whose death had been self-inflicted. That threw a new light on the matter.

"Maybe," he mused, "maybe she *did*."

He referred, of course, to Miss Carey, and to the possibility of her concealing the knife. Then it flashed across his mind that his own presence in the room might prove embarrassing. If the police learned of it they might suspect him of making way with the evidence of suicide. The idea harassed him; it haunted him. The more he thought of it, the more he regretted having responded to Miss Carey's signal of distress.

It was no affair of his and yet, singularly enough, fate had associated him with both ends of the mystery. It had even placed in his hands the only clew. And then, as if to play with him and with all concerned, it had so arranged affairs that he could not disclose his knowledge or reveal the nature of his clew. It was genuine irony!

There was still another bit of information in the newspaper-reports that interested Dinkey. It was concerned with the police opinion of the wound in the arm.

"There was a small cut in the left arm," a newspaper reported Detective Hilland as saying, "and, outside of this, no mark of violence except the cut in the throat—no bruise or scratch. Only the Doctor herself could have inflicted the wound that killed her and left no other mark of violence on the body. As for the cut in the arm, that was done, no doubt, when the doctor made

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the fatal gash. Nerving herself to the desperate deed, she slashed with all her might, a little wildly, and stabbed the left arm slightly. She probably was holding her head with the left hand."

Sergeant Hilland illustrated. "He seized his forehead," read the account, "closed his eyes, jabbed wildly at his own throat with the right hand and struck the left forearm a sharp and distinctive blow."

"It's very simple," he had told the reporters.

"But," mused Dinkey, "she cut herself in the arm *after* she had cut her throat—*after* the blood was out of the body. If there'd been any blood left, that cut would've bled. It sure would."

He turned his attention to the lost-columns. But no advertisement appeared there describing the watch in Dinkey's possession.

"He's in his hole," commented Dinkey, "an' if he's wise, he'll stay there."

He considered the situation. The owner, if he was innocent of all knowledge of the Dr. Brander affair, would follow two courses of procedure. First of all, no doubt, he would advertise in the hope of recovering his watch. Then he would come forward to volunteer the statement that he was near the scene of Dr. Brander's death at approximately the time she died, and—Dinkey turned a little pale.

"——!" he muttered, falling back on his favorite expletive. "He'd say he saw some one else there! He'd describe me!"

Dinkey's dinner no longer appealed to him. His appetite had departed. His mind leaped ahead to a direful calamity that suddenly thrust itself above the rim of his horizon. It might be necessary, he meditated, to confess to picking pockets to save himself from the electric chair. Yes, it *would* be necessary. He shuddered.

But calmer reflection came to his rescue. The stranger had not come forward and he had not advertised the loss of his watch. Dinkey would give him time—ample time. In any event, his own hands were tied. It would be useless, it would even be dangerous, for him to take the initiative. No—it was the loser's play. Dinkey could only hold his cards and wait.

And for the waiting, the owner of the watch would pay. Dinkey would see to that. If, as a last resort, he had to hunt him out, there would pass into Dinkey's hands a sum larger than that represented by the value of the watch. It would be no mere reward. It would be a sum large enough to pay for silence.

Yet, somehow, he didn't feel a ready approval of this newer idea. He did not realize, of course, that the three unimportant incidents that had befallen him since the adventure in Dr. Brander's apartment, though far removed from the enigma of the doctor's death, were to have, through their effect upon him, a direct part in the solution of the "unreadable riddle."

But they were beginning their work.

FOR six successive days thereafter the landlady of Dinkey's humble abode observed the importation into his apartment of fish-bowls. They came in varying sizes, large, small and medium, and they came in varying quantities. They came whole and they went in fragments. Thrice daily she collected from Dinkey's hands a neat bundle of the pieces.

To say that the good woman was amazed is to express it mildly; she was astounded. And she was consumed with curiosity. Her lodger, however, was not given either to frequency or to quantity of speech, and he vouchsafed no explanation. Neither did he explain his purchase of three second-hand silk hats, nor the delivery to his room of two dozen eggs and a school of goldfish.

It is true she surprised him on one occasion on his hands and knees on the floor carefully obliterating the remains of a raw egg from the worn carpet and, on another, she was made unpleasantly cognizant of the fact that at least one of the strictly fresh eggs had belied its guarantee. But these discoveries served more to increase her curiosity than to satisfy it.

It was not until the advent of a pair of live rabbits and a duck that she found voice for both question and protest. Their appearance nerved her to demand the explanation. And it came promptly and without resentment. Her lodger was rehearsing sleight-of-hand tricks. Would she witness a few? She would—and then and there she was lost. Thereafter, because she was interested, she domiciled the rabbits and the increasing flock of poultry in the cellar and, because she was liberally paid, she saw honestly to their feeding and became head attendant of the miniature aquarium.

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Dinkey worked early and late. He paid no heed to the complaint of the tired muscles of hands and arms. He forced them on to the attainment of precision and, gradually, they responded easily and gracefully in every movement of lightning-like swiftness demanded of them. The stiffness of two years of barrel-building departed, and a strength and sureness and agility that surprised Dinkey himself made their appearance. He paused only to eat, to sleep and to read the newspapers. And thus the week passed.

It brought nothing new in the Dr. Brander affair save the inevitable subsidence of public interest. The papers had exhausted its thrill, squeezed it dry of popular appeal and cast it aside for something of later development. The police were done with it and, officially, the case was finished.

Thus the matter stood on Saturday morning when Dinkey, repairing to breakfast, varied his routine enough to pass the apartment-house for the first time since the finding of the body. The place was closed, the blinds down and the Doctor's sign removed. On the Saturday before, Dinkey recalled, at that very hour, he was viewing the gruesome sight that the little bedroom contained. And to-day, he mused, he alone could throw light upon the mystery and—he dared not.

The newly awakened interest in his work, his honest work, had filled Dinkey with even deeper dread of prison than he had known on the day of his release. He was tasting for the first time the joy of confidence in himself, in his ability to make a living cleanly and in a manner that promised change, variety, travel, even excitement.

And a dozen times during the week he had been tempted to dispose of the watch and wash his hands of the whole affair. There was scarcely one chance in a thousand, hardly one in a million, that the loser could describe Dinkey—had he cared to—with enough accuracy to enable the police to detect his identity. Only the watch, therefore, remained as a connecting link.

Miss Carey, so far as Dinkey could learn, had forgotten utterly that any one had come to her assistance; or the police, obsessed with the suicide-theory, had ignored the fact. But, however that might be, he was very sure that Miss Carey could not describe him to the police or to any one else. He believed that until Miss Brander's arrival the girl had been completely dazed, acting as one in a trance, and later recalling none of the incidents that intervened between her discovery of the body and the arrival of the detectives.

So, indeed, she had repeatedly declared, insisting that she could not even recollect telephoning; and immediately the police had viewed this as further support for their suicide-contention.

"A very clever young woman," they held her to be, "who knew what to forget and what to remember."

CHAPTER VI

C. Z.

EACH day had found Dinkey a little more confident that he held the upper hand so long as he held the watch. So it had remained beneath his dresser where he had first concealed it. Twice he had examined it for further clues, but he had found nothing aside from the monogram to reveal the owner's identity. But this, he had reasoned, was more than sufficient. A glance at the pages of the city directory had assured him that names beginning with Z were not plentiful and that the list dwindled to a mere score when the C was added. It would be easy enough to run them all down and, if one was missing from the city and the time of his departure was within the span of the closing week—why, the work was done.

Dinkey read the lost-columns as usual. He alternated between hope of finding the notice he sought and fear that he would find it. Three morning papers, perused as he breakfasted, yielded no returns, but, as Dinkey's eyes traveled down the column in the fourth, they came to a sudden pause. He felt a tremor slip up his back-bone and creep into the roots of his hair.

He read and reread and read again. For a while the words were meaningless, then, gradually, they became startlingly clear. It seemed to Dinkey that they shouted. He felt the blood rush into his face; his cheeks were burning.

Vaguely he wondered if any one in the café observed him. He stole covert glances in all directions. But, apparently, he was unnoticed. He tried to be calm, tossing the paper aside as the waiter served him, but

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reaching for it stealthily the moment the man's back was turned.

There it was; there was no denying it:

LOST—Gold watch and fob. Watch bears initials C. Z. Reward. 516 Virginia Bldg.

It required time for Dinkey to regain his composure, but, when he left the café, he was in complete command of himself. A definite purpose filled his mind. He would go directly to his room, take the watch and make his way by the shortest route to the river and rid himself of it, finally and forever.

If the mysterious C. Z. could have known at that moment what thought lay uppermost in Dinkey's mind, he would have seconded it with fervor and he would have assisted with enthusiasm in carrying it into execution. However, at that moment, Dinkey needed nothing to urge him on. He was proceeding with all due speed to carry his purpose into effect and he meant to permit nothing to delay him.

Still, something *did* delay him—two things, as a matter of fact, and both as widely remote from the Dr. Brander affair as any circumstance in the world could be. Yet they conspired to alter Dinkey's decision.

In front of Ward's saloon Dinkey was accosted by "Slink" Rader.

"Fer gosh sake, Dinkey," Slink wailed, "stake me to the price of a meal."

Dinkey paused. He had known Slink before he'd been sent to prison, but, in the derelict before him, Dinkey could hardly recognize any traces of the man of three years before.

"Oh, yer ain't forgot me, Dinkey, me boy. I'm on me uppers. I'm down an' out. Here," he drew him aside and whispered in his ear, "I won't lie to ye, Dinkey. I want enough to buy a shot. It's got me."

Yes, Dinkey could see. The nervous fingers were already clasped round the little hypodermic. Dinkey produced a half-dollar. It dropped into Slink's dirty claw.

"Ye're the real sort, Dinkey, an' no mistake. Maybe sometime I can return the favor. You see what it's done fer me. Look at me arm."

He pulled up the ragged sleeve to the elbow and Dinkey saw the marks of the needle thick in the skin.

THE mark of the needle? Why, somehow, he'd thought of the mark of a needle when he saw that wound on Dr. Brander's arm. And it hadn't bled! He paid no heed to Slink's disappearance. He stood still, thinking.

"The blood came out of her neck like water out of a bottle," he repeated.

"An' the needle leaves a mark," he mused.

Four minutes later Dinkey was aroused from his reverie by the voice of Mabel Sanders.

"You're not speaking to your friends this morning, Willie Lewis," she said by way of greeting.

She was smiling at him.

"By gracious, I didn't see you!" he explained. "I was thinking about——" he paused.

"It doesn't matter," she went on, covering his embarrassment. "You're neglecting your friends anyway, these days—we can't expect to share your thoughts. Larry Corrigan's been askin' about you, too."

"I've been workin', Mabel."

It slipped from his lips very naturally.

"Workin'?" she queried.

"Well, that is, I—I—I've been practisin'."

"Oh." She seemed disappointed.

"New tricks, Mabel," he explained, quickly.

"Willie! I'm glad! I'm glad!" Her eyes sparkled. "I'm real glad."

"All week."

He could think of nothing more to say.

"I know you can make good, Willie—you can!"

"I saw the fellow at the Olympic, an' I've been doin' some tricks like his only a—a—little harder, I think."

She rested her hand on his arm.

"Ask Corrigan to help you, Willie. He knows the manager of the theater; he can introduce you. An' Corrigan's your friend."

"I know," he agreed.

A look of disappointment came suddenly into her eyes.

"I forgot, Willie," she said. "Corrigan can't do much for you just now. He's in bad himself. His wife has been tellin' me. Some young officers, she says, tryin' to make records for themselves, picked up some men right under Corrigan's nose. He knew they were there, too, but he let 'em alone because they weren't guilty of what

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they were charged with. Just the same, though, they were sent up, an' Corrigan has been accused of standin' in with 'em."

"I'd not heard of it; not a word."

"I don't think he's been charged outright, Willie—not formally, I mean. But he's been reprimanded, an' he's afraid the other's comin', too."

"It's a shame," Dinkey protested; "an' there ain't a squarer man on the force either."

"Willie," she went on, "here's a chance for you. Don't you see? Here are two men who ain't guilty sent to prison just on their general bad reputation——"

"I told you," he interrupted.

"Listen," she commanded.

"I am listenin'," he grumbled.

"You can't be listening very hard, making all these interruptions."

"I'm sorry," he apologized.

"Well," continued the girl, mollified. "this is what I mean. "Here's Corrigan in bad on the deal. Why couldn't you help? Why couldn't you quietly turn up the fellows that are really guilty? Couldn't you?"

"I don't know."

"It would square Corrigan."

"It might," he assented.

"It would release innocent men from prison."

She checked off the points on her fingers,

He nodded.

"It would be justice."

Again he nodded.

"An'," she touched her fourth finger, "it would put *you* right. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see, Mabel. But I ain't ever been a stool-pigeon——"

"How'd you like to be one of those two men in prison?"

"I wouldn't like it, that's sure."

"An' you don't want to turn Corrigan down?"

"No."

"Well, you see?"

"It ain't easy to decide. Besides, I mightn't be able to do anything anyway."

"Think about it, Willie. You haven't forgotten our agreement?"

"About the theater?"

"Yes."

"No. I ain't goin' to either."

She held out her hand, and a moment later Dinkey was standing alone.

And, it will be noted, another circumstance had shot its thread into the pattern.

CHAPTER VII

A TALK WITH DETECTIVE-SERGEANT CORRIGAN

DINKEY possessed himself of the watch, but, instead of making for the river, as he had intended, he retraced his steps and began a search for Corrigan. A plan for coming to the old detective's rescue had come into Dinkey's mind. It was vague, to be sure, but, he reflected, it would take shape later. The immediate necessity was to find Corrigan and he spent the remainder of the morning in a fruitless search. At two in the afternoon, however, his search was rewarded.

"I'd like to have a quiet talk with you, sergeant," he explained.

If Corrigan was anxious, his anxiety was not reflected in his demeanor. Long schooling had taught him the art of concealing his own thoughts and emotions.

"As many as ye loike, me lad," he consented.

And the two repaired to a basement café, where they found seclusion behind a convenient screen. Dinkey wasted no words in preamble, but plunged at once into his subject. He began, however, with his encounter with Miss Carey.

"I've said nothing," he explained, "because I was afraid, after the police said some one hid the knife, that no one'd believe me. There wasn't any knife there, sergeant, an' I was the second person on the scene—not Miss Brander. She never hid it, an' you c'n bet your badge Miss Carey didn't neither."

He went into detail, describing the body as he found it. There was no blood on the fingers of either hand. There was no blood anywhere except in the immediate vicinity of the spot where the head rested.

"I don't know much about such things, o' course," he continued, "but I've seen more'n one gink who'd slashed his throat, an' seen the spot where he stood or where he laid down when he done it, an' I never saw any of 'em slash so deep as the cut in Dr. Brander's throat. Her head was half cut off. Everything'd been cut. You could see, for the head was tilted back—just as though it had been *pressed* back; an' the wound was gaping wide open.

"Now, here's the strange part of it: The blood hadn't spurted. Everything'd been

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cut an' the blood hadn't spurted. That struck me as queer, but, right then, I didn't know what it was that seemed strange. But, the more I got to thinkin' about it, the stranger that seemed. Arteries had been cut an' the blood hadn't spurted. I remember they hung two fellows once on a point like that—Johnson and Walton."

"I remember that case," Corrigan confirmed. "They cut off a girl's head an' said she was dead when they done it. But it was proved she was alive 'cause the blood had spurted out o' the arteries o' the neck when they'd been cut—spurted on some bushes growin' 'round the spot where they found the body."

"Well, in this case," Dinkey proceeded, "the blood just *run* out—like you'd empty it from a bottle. I couldn't make anything out of it then. Not even after I saw the wound on the arm."

"That struck me as queer, too," Corrigan agreed.

"It was a short cut, but it was deep. It wasn't made by accident—any one could see that. *An' it hadn't bled at all.* I knew right away, when I saw it, that it'd been made after her throat had been cut. Look here," Dinkey rolled up his coat-sleeve. "I took a razor an' made a little scratch in the same place. It wasn't hardly skin deep, but it bled a whole lot. It didn't look like more'n four or five drops o' blood had come out of that cut on the Doctor's arm. I couldn't understand it, but, somehow, I knew that gash was the key to the whole thing.

"Then, this mornin', I ran into Slink Rader. He wanted money for coke an' when I gave him a half-dollar he showed me his arm. It was marked up with the holes left by the needle—you know how—an' that gave me an idea. It may be all wrong, but, if you say the word, we'll know before the day's over."

Corrigan nodded. He was non-committal, but he was interested. He had seen too many theories go wrong, even when they seemed unassailable, to give any of them unqualified endorsement. Dinkey had important facts. He wanted the facts. If a theory went with them, all right; he'd listen. Later, he'd do his own theorizing.

"We'll see," he said.

"Well, you c'n suit yourself. Here's the way it looks to me." Dinkey leaned forward in his chair, lowering his voice. "She was killed *before* her throat was cut!"

"What killed her?" demanded Corrigan.

Dinkey paused a moment before he answered. He knew what he was about to say would sound absurd, even ridiculous, and he had no desire to be laughed at. He was in earnest, and he wanted his idea to be treated seriously.

"A hypodermic needle," he replied slowly.

Corrigan shook his head.

"I don't follow you, Dinkey," he added.

"That's the reason for the wound in th' arm. You see—th' needle left a mark, maybe raised a lump or somethin' o' that sort. He made th' cut to hide it."

"But why'd he slash her throat?"

"To throw the police off the trail," Dinkey responded promptly, "to make 'em believe it *was* the cut in the throat that killed her. Don't you see? If the murderer didn't do somethin' like that, they'd find the needle-mark, or the cut in the arm—which'd amount to the same thing—an' then they'd know *how* it was really done an', knowin' that, it'd be lots easier to run the man down. Anybody could 'a' cut her throat. But there ain't very many runnin' 'round killin' with hypodermic syringes. That was a wise guy, sergeant; take it from me. He knew his business."

"It ain't impossible," Corrigan conceded. "No, sir, it ain't impossible."

"Well, I'm ready to take you to the chap that did it."

Dinkey had not meant to make so bold a statement. But, carried away by putting into words the theory that had slowly been forming in his mind for a week, he was committed to the statement before he realized it.

"At least," he amended, "I think he's the man."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know his name. I don't know anything about him except where his office is."

Dinkey was beginning to freeze up. Corrigan knew the signs. He knew, too, that with men like Dinkey one must strike while the iron is hot. He made up his mind quickly.

"All right," he said, "let's start."

"LOOK here, sergeant," Dinkey temporized, "I want you to understand I'm doing the best I can. I'm goin' straight if I get the chance. I'm goin' to work. I want to clean off the slate with

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this. I want to square things. If I'm right, an' you nail the man, it's gotta be agreed that I'm out o' it. If I'm wrong—well, you jest forget what I say to him an' what he says to me. I want to turn this trick for you; to set you right again. I'm no fool, an' I know it'll make you solid. But I don't want to be the fall guy. It's a gamble for both of us. I want you to go partners. If I've guessed wrong, don't turn an' sink the gaff in me. What d'ye say? Is it a go?"

"I told you once, Dinkey, I'd be your friend. That's enough."

The two men looked at each other across the table. Their eyes met and the gaze held. Both were satisfied. Dinkey rose.

"All right. There's just one thing more. If I'm right in all I've said, what'd you take this guy to be—what's his business, I mean?"

"Looks like a doctor, Dinkey."

"Well, wait a minute. I'll see."

It was evidence of Sergeant Corrigan's faith in Dinkey and in his strange theory, too, that he sat where he was while Dinkey left the café and made his way to the nearest telephone-station. He found the "Z's." He read the address of each. He found what he sought:

Zeeler, Dr. Carl, Room 516 Virginia Bldg.

Dinkey called the number. A man's voice answered, and Dinkey recognized it.

"Did you lose a watch?" Dinkey inquired.

"Yes," came the response. "Did you find one?"

"Yes."

"My initials are on mine."

Dinkey thought he detected a note of uncertainty in the voice.

"C. Z. are on this," he replied.

There was a moment's pause.

"Where'd you find it?"

Was the voice a shade fainter or did Dinkey imagine it? He pretended not to hear.

"I'll be right up with it."

"When did you find it?"

The question had changed.

"Oh," Dinkey replied, "three or four days ago. Will you be there?"

"Yes. I'll wait."

There was the slightest note of relief in the voice, but the tones were not wholly free from anxiety. Dinkey hung up the receiver.

"Poor devil," he muttered. "Well, I've given him his chance. He doesn't have to *be* there—he can have a thirty-minute start."

He returned to Corrigan.

"He *is* a doctor," he said. "Come. He's waitin'; he might get impatient."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEATH-NEEDLE

DINKEY and Corrigan did not stand on ceremony. When they reached the door of 516, they pushed it open and entered. They stepped into a laboratory, rather than into a doctor's office. The shelves that occupied the wall-space were lined with bottles, and on every hand was to be seen the apparatus of the chemist. The odor that associates itself with a miscellaneous collection of drugs was heavy in the air. The place reeked with it. In an adjoining room, through a door slightly ajar, they could see the Doctor. His form was hidden in a laboratory-gown, and he was seated at a bench.

Apparently Dr. Zeeler was unaware of their presence in the outer office. He continued his work and was bent, at the moment, over a microscope. In the dim light of the room, the electric bulb whose rays illumined the specimen he was examining cast its light full in his face. The features stood forth with startling precision. He was evidently a man of medium height and though, when he finally spoke to them, his speech betrayed no trace of foreign accent, his Teutonic origin showed plainly in his face, his complexion, his straw-colored hair and his small, close-cropped, light mustache.

Corrigan, with his broader experience and observation, saw in the man immediately the characteristics of the fanatic—the man of a single purpose to whom the end, provided it could be gained, would justify the means.

The two visitors paused on the threshold of the second door until the Doctor, suddenly conscious of their presence, looked up from his work.

"Yes?" he inquired.

"I've come about the watch," Dinkey announced, abruptly.

Corrigan was puzzled, but he made no comment.

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"Oh," said Dr. Zeeler, "you are the one who telephoned?"

He kept his stool, but he turned from his bench—wearily, Dinkey thought—and faced the two men before him.

"Yes, I 'phoned," Dinkey responded. "I have the watch,"

"You found it?"

"I—*have* it," Dinkey answered, deliberately inserting the pause and laying emphasis on the verb. The effect on the other was not lost.

"So," he said, as though deliberating the other's meaning. "You *have* it. And the reward—I'm not a man of means. I'm a scientist, and we make very little money. I will pay——"

Dinkey interrupted.

"Doctor, would you be kind enough to say, 'I beg your pardon'?"

Dr. Zeeler smiled, but it was not an easy smile.

"Why should I say that?" he asked.

Dinkey stepped a little closer.

"Because your voice is familiar," he said.

THE man on the little stool caught the menace in the tone. For a moment he was motionless. Then the eyelids flickered. Their movement was hardly perceptible, but Corrigan saw. Dinkey's shot had told. Whatever it was the lad was talking about, it was evident the other understood him. Dr. Zeeler struggled to hold the smile that had parted his lips the moment before but it eluded him.

"So-o-o?"

It was a syllable of inquiry. It was a polite but fearful request for further enlightenment. It was nicely calculated to express a gentle interest. It said nothing, nor did it entail upon the other the duty of continuing. It was, in a word, admirably adapted to the purpose it was intended to serve and, above all else, it was noncommittal.

"I'm goin' to tell you where I met you an' when," Dinkey continued.

He jerked his thumb toward Corrigan.

"*He* says I've got to—ain't that right?"

Corrigan was in the dark, perplexed and mystified, but he was equal to the occasion.

"That's right," he agreed.

"And *he* is——" The doctor spoke softly, but a tremor had crept into his voice.

"He is a detective."

"Ah!"

It was scarcely more than a sigh—the sigh of one who is very tired.

"You ran into me," Dinkey proceeded, "at three minutes of two o'clock last Saturday morning. An' when you ran into me—you lost your watch. It struck two just a little later; that's how I happen to know."

The man on the stool was silent. His face had grown pale and his long, slender fingers closed and opened, closed and opened. The chin had dropped slightly, and the eyes, gazing at Dinkey, were wide open, staring. He seemed suddenly to have shrunk. The change awakened Dinkey's pity and he hurried, eager to be done with it.

"You were comin' out of the alley when you ran into me," he went on, "an' that alley is behind the apartment where Dr. Brander lived. You'd just come out of her back door. You——"

"You'd just killed Dr. Brander!" Corrigan broke in.

Dr. Zeeler's head sank upon his breast. His whole body shook. The two men watched him in silence, while he struggled to regain his self-control.

"I'VE expected this," he said presently, his voice hoarse and scarcely audible. "I don't mean to deny it. I never meant to deny it. The idea of escaping punishment only came to me when the police called it suicide. And even then I thought the watch might turn up and bring the thing home to me. But, as the days went by and it was evident the police had dismissed the matter, I became convinced the watch had not been lost near the scene of the crime. I felt safe."

He turned to Dinkey.

"*You* were the only one I feared. I never dreamed you had the watch, but I was afraid the man I collided with at the mouth of the alley would be able to recognize me, to describe me so that I might be identified. But time passed and you did not come forward, and again I felt that chance had befriended me. I thought you'd gone from the city, and the incident left no impression in your mind. Anyway, you were silent and the time for speaking had passed.

"But the watch—the watch always bothered me. I thought of it day and night. It never left my mind. If I could only recover it, I thought, my fear would come to an end. Last night I went over every detail. I reviewed the affair incident by incident. I

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argued with myself. And the more I reasoned the surer I became that the watch could not connect me with the crime. If it could have done that, I concluded, I should long ago have heard from it.

"Last Saturday morning, I walked from Dr. Brander's apartment to my own lodging—a distance of a mile. Any place along the way the watch might have been lost. I did not miss it until I rose at eight o'clock. I considered all these facts, as I say, last night, and I decided to advertise. You see the result."

Dr. Zeeler paused. The look of fear, however, had passed from his face. He was calm, and there was even an air of quiet dignity about him; it was reflected in his voice, in his manner, in his bearing.

"Gentlemen," he continued, "I killed Dr. Brander, and I do not regret it. For five years I have given up my life to research-work, and that work has been concerned with but one purpose, one aim, one ambition. I have sought to segregate, to identify the germ that causes acute anterior poliomyelitis. You know the disease, no doubt, by its common name—infantile paralysis. It is caused by an organism so minute that this microscope here must magnify it fifteen hundred times before it is visible to the eye.

"You can understand, perhaps, that even the most enthusiastic of us become worn in time from too much application to the lens. There were days when my sight failed me and I found relief now and then in calling upon Dr. Brander for assistance. She was an expert with the glass, reliable and accurate, and there were details that could safely be trusted to her. I employed her, too, though I could ill afford to do so, because she appealed to me more than once for assistance. She needed even the small sums I could pay her.

"I shall not go into details. Let it suffice to say that when I felt my long labor was nearing the end, when success seemed within my grasp, I found that this woman had stolen my ideas, my work, my labor—five years of my life—and was bending every energy to make final proof before I could finish my work and gain the reward that would greet the announcement of my discovery.

"I said nothing to arouse her suspicion, but continued night and day at my work. But my eyes failed me. The specialist ordered a complete rest for a week. If I disobeyed him, he said, I'd be blind.

"I was desperate. A week! Why, in that length of time Dr. Brander would gain a lead I could never overcome. The thought was maddening. I sat here after the specialist's verdict and considered the situation. 'Finders are keepers,' gentlemen, in the game of science. If she announced the discovery, I could protest in vain—the victory, the triumph would be hers. My work would count for naught.

"I made up my mind quickly. I would stop her. I went about my preparations calmly, deliberately. I knew she was a fair match for a man of ordinary physique, and I am by no means as strong as I appear to be.

"I put a surgeon's scalpel in my pocket—a blade some three inches long, strong and keen of edge and borne in a handle very similar to the ordinary desk-knife. I filled a hypodermic syringe with hydrocyanic acid—you know it as prussic acid—and I was ready. Hydrocyanic acid, hypodermically injected, will kill in two seconds. It is sure, unescapable. It paralyzes the heart almost instantly.

"AT TEN o'clock last Saturday night, I called her by 'phone. I pretended great excitement. I told her that I had work for her to do, important work that permitted no delay. I asked her if she could devote the night to it if I brought it to her a little later. It was a bait she could not resist; she *had* to know, of course, what I had discovered.

"She replied, as I thought she would, that she'd wait for me. I could come any time. If she happened to fall asleep, I was to enter her reception-room and knock on her bedroom-door. To make this possible she said she would conceal the key to the outer door under the mat. I would find it there.

"Twice, gentlemen, I went by the apartment. On each occasion, however, some one passing at the moment caused me to turn aside. But, the third time, a little after one o'clock, no one was in sight. I went in swiftly, knocked softly on the door and Dr. Brander opened it almost immediately.

"'I'm later than I expected to be,' I explained.

"'It makes no difference,' she replied.

"I produced the package of slides I had

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made up for her benefit and placed it in her hands.

" 'Doctor,' I said, 'I've worked five years to obtain the result I think you'll find on these slides. I want you to go over every field searchingly and make an accurate description of what you find there. All the hope I have in the world is represented by those bits of glass. Whether my work is a success or a failure depends on how your finding checks with my own.'

"I meant her to know what she'd been stealing. The only sign of interest, however, that she disclosed was in the slight nervousness with which she slipped the elastic from the package. She unwrapped the covering slowly while I stood by her side, my hand on the little hypodermic. I knew she would recognize the slides as old ones, bearing labels she herself had pasted on them. I intended she should recognize them. As her eyes fell on her own familiar handiwork she turned slightly toward me.

" 'Why,' she exclaimed, 'these are not new slides!'

" 'No,' I replied. 'You are done with new slides for all time!'

"She started back, but she was too late. I had plunged the needle in her arm and the contents of the syringe had entered her blood. I'm sure she understood, but, for the fraction of a second, she stood looking at her arm. Then she turned her eyes on mine. I smiled in her face.

"She started to utter a scream but it died on her lips. A moment later, she was sinking to the floor. I caught her as she fell and half dragged, half carried her to her bedroom and placed the body on the bed. With the scalpel I cut her throat. The heart was still long before I made the incision. The flow of the blood showed that. I looked at her arm where the needle had penetrated and I found the skin discolored slightly. It had taken on a bluish tint that showed in a circle round the needle-wound.

"I made a second incision here to destroy all trace of the original. I cleaned my knife on a spot where I knew the blood from her throat would shortly flow, put the knife back in my pocket and—I was done. There was not a drop of blood on my fingers or on my clothes. I had killed, gentlemen, in the most modern, the most scientific way in the world. I doubt whether a chemical analysis of the blood would have disclosed the method employed."

Dr. Zeeler gazed calmly at his two auditors. And calmly he reached across his bench and took in his hand a little syringe.

"This is the weapon." He smiled. "Its wound, as Shakespeare said, 'is not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve'."

Before either Dinkey or Corrigan could move, with a sudden thrust Dr. Zeeler drove the needle against his own arm.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I told you I've been expecting this. I was prepared."

He pressed the little plunger home.

CORRIGAN and Dinkey bent over the body of Dr. Zeeler. But the heart had ceased to beat.

Dinkey took from his own pocket the dead man's watch and placed it in the pocket whence; one week before, circumstances had conspired to extract it. Circumstances now returned it. They tiptoed softly from the room and shut the door behind them.

"An'," said Sergeant Corrigan, in a lowered voicd, "it's all been done for a bug—for a bug so little ye must magnify it a thousand times before ye c'n see it."

IT WAS Spring. At the entrance of the Olympic Theater two men and a woman stood talking.

Lieutenant Corrigan was congratulating the Marvelous Mareau on the success of his bewildering sleight-of-hand performance.

"My wife," answered the performer, with a modesty not often met with in the profession, "is the one to congratulate. Mabel is the real brains. She's all of it."

He smiled at the woman who stood at his elbow.

"I don't doubt it, me lad," the lieutenant answered. "I don't doubt it at all. But ye had good material to work with, Mrs Lewis, even if it was a bit rough in th' beginnin'."

"I always thought it would do," she said.

"By-the-way, lieutenant," the Marvelous Mareau continued, "I'm in debt to society—as my wife calls it—to the extent of precisely $137. I don't see how I can pay—not that I'm not able and willing, but my debtors are scattered and I'm afraid I'd not recognize them. You see, I—I——"

"Niver ye moind, Dinkey, me bhoy. Society's gettin' off —— cheap. Yer pardon, ma'am."

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The Camp-Fire

A Meeting-place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

IT WILL throw some light on "A Five O'Clock Soldier" by Thomas Samson Miller if you will read the following two articles from the agreement Mr. Miller himself signed when he went to work for the Royal Niger Chartered Company in West Africa:

(4) Mr. Thomas Samson Miller agrees that any assets earned by him or any consideration or present received by him in the Nigerian sphere during the currency of this Agreement shall be the property of The Company, and shall be notified to the board at the earliest opportunity, and if required remitted to them.

(10) Mr. Thomas Samson Miller agrees that he will communicate to The Company any discovery of pecuniary value made by him or any knowledge of any kind whatsoever that he may acquire directly or indirectly in the Nigerian sphere during the continuance of this agreement. . . . And Mr. Thomas Samson Miller agrees that upon each and every breach of this clause he shall pay to The Company the sum of ONE THOUSAND POUNDS, by way of liquidated damages and not by way of penalty, but any such payment shall not restrict the right of The Company to restrain continuance of such breach.

AUGUSTUS POST has had many balloon experiences—international cup-races, record flights, narrow escapes from death, and so on, but probably neither he nor any other balloonman has been through anything more hair-raising than his fall in the *Conqueror*, told in this number. Naturally the papers of the world were full of it at the time, but now we have the story complete from Mr. Post himself.

I FIND there are a good many women among our readers, but it is only now and then that they're willing to rise in their places about the Camp-Fire and talk to the rest of us. So that we listen with doubled attention when they do give us a woman's point of view on adventure and the Wanderlust:

MAY a woman enter the circle of your Camp-Fire for a moment? A woman with the heart of a nomad and who has had a few small adventures. It may be that my love of the wild, of horses and shooting, is inherited from a father who was a brigadier-general in the Confederate Army.

At the age of sixteen I found myself living in the pine woods of Florida where my only occupations were riding and hunting, and soon achieved quite a reputation both as a shot and as a tournament-rider. People came for miles to see the girl jouster. We kept a pack of hounds and many is the night I've spent with my thoroughbred and dogs in a wild ride through the woods.

WHEN twenty-five I went to Mexico by way of Cuba and on board ship my singing made a friend for me in the person of an elegant old gentleman, and when I landed with him in Vera Cruz I was paid so much homage that I inquired who he was and learned that he was the Secretary of the Mexican Navy. I lived for six months in an hacienda one hundred miles from a railroad, where my only amusement was hunting. Deer and wild hog were numerous and raised no excitement, and occasionally we had the pleasure of taking the beautiful skin of a mountain *tigre*. I kept my rifle hand in practise shooting *sopalotes* (buzzards) in the head, that being the only spot proving fatal.

When leaving the ranch it was necessary for me to go alone with only a *mozo* for guide and a Colt's .48 for chaperone. I rode 125 miles in three days through trails so seldom used that at places the machetes had to be brought into use. A part of this ride was on the border of the terrible Valle Nacional so much written of in the magazines a few years ago.

MY DESTINATION was the free lands of New Mexico where I expected to take up a claim, which I did upon arrival. I spent a year there alone, twelve miles from a post-office and four from the nearest neighbor. My adventures with "locoed" horses, sheep-herding and wandering Mexicans would be a tale of itself. I am now in my home State a little south of the Ohio, bounded round by

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convention. I belong to several women's clubs and am a member of the Music Committee of the State Federation. To all appearances I am as the rest of my sex—am considered a beautiful housekeeper, but South America and the lonesome trail are forever calling like a siren. To feel the cleansing wash of the rain in my face as I ride some mountain trail getting over fifty miles a day would be a joy indescribable.—Very truly yours, No. C. 112.

HENRY OYEN, who gives us "A Touch of Red" this month, came to this country some twenty-eight years ago from Christiania, Norway, where he had been born a year or so earlier. He grew up in the Big Woods belt of northern Wisconsin, at a time "when, in the reverse English of the lumber-jack, 'them woods towns was *good!*' "

Six years of newspaper work as special writer on a Chicago paper supplied one or two introductions to the big moments that restless spirits hanker for and go back to in memory in the long, dull days of humdrum existence. Once, in company with a little Irish staff photographer who would have gone to Gehenna and snapped Old Nick if the city editor had said so and the expense-account were long enough, the writer discovered in one of the stockaded plants of one of our pet giant corporations a private cemetery where workmen killed in the plant were buried without benefit of clergy or inconvenience of inquest.

The stockade was twelve feet high. First the photographer went over, standing on the writer's shoulders. Then the camera. Then the writer, at the expense of finger-nails and coat- and vest-buttons. Five minutes later, with the precious camera loaded with half a dozen plates of the secret graveyard, we were running around in the plant with a burly watchman and a short-barreled Smith & Wesson in hot pursuit.

A freight train saved us. It was pulling out of the plant. We found a flat-car and leaped aboard. Lying face down, we went out of the stockade with the Smith & Wesson spitting lead above our heads. Those short barrels always throw high. And the Giant Corporation nearly got our jobs and that of the editor who had backbone enough to print the stuff, when it saw its little iniquity exposed in two pages in colors!

Ah, those were the happy days! The little staff photog. is now running a moving-picture camera some place up the Amazon, where there's a chance of things happening. Lucky dog!

YOU know why Arthur D. Howden Smith is able to speak from first-hand experience about the Balkans. This month he gives us a clear picture of Albania. All of us know about Albania already—in a way. We read about it all last Winter and Spring when the newspapers carried daily reports from the war of the Balkans on Turkey. But when it comes right down to the scratch I guess most of us could tell precious little about Albania and the Albanians. I think you'll find Mr. Smith's article pretty interesting. I did.

And let's go back for a minute to that old "chestnut"—"Truth is stranger than fiction." Every time some one writes a bit of magazine fiction about some imaginary island or kingdom and spins a plot about kings and rival kings and adventurers and revolutions and feuds and all that kind of thing, well, after we've read it we generally feel sort of wise and pass a few remarks about fairy-tales and "what an imagination these writer fellows have." It takes a sober bit of history, like this Albania article, to wake us up to the fact that, so long as he lets the supernatural alone, a fiction writer has to strain himself very hard indeed to turn out a stranger plot than can be found in the records of real fact and history.

WE POOR editors—and writers too—have to allow for this lack of credulity. I've turned down many a good story simply because I knew its plot would be regarded as poppycock by the average reader, whereas the truth of the matter was that it was really, solidly based on fact.

The real point, of course, is that the fiction story itself must be the test. It doesn't matter whether it is all "imagination" or is all the truthful record of events that actually happened. Does the story as it stands convince the reader? Can he read it and enjoy it without stopping to question whether it really happened? In fine, is it true to life in general, regardless of whether one or more stray-fact examples happen to back it up? That's the deciding question.

I don't mean that I always succeed in judging this point aright. Or that many other factors don't enter into the choosing of stories. I'm simply telling you some of my troubles along the "truth stranger than fiction" line and pointing out the Albania article as a sample of present-day fact tending to make a man go slow before he says "it couldn't have happened."

HERE is a letter from a man whom I have since come to know personally, he having become a member of the Adventurers' Club of New York:

Since the age of eighteen I've been going up and down the earth, hither and yon, in the heart of London one month, doing the social whirl, and the next month way off in the back beyond, fighting my way through savages whose heavy Winter costume

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was a string around the waist, and a scanty dish-cloth hanging from it. I've broiled in the Tropics digging gold, and frozen in the North; I've fought red Indians, brown Indians, Malays, Chinese and New York gunmen. I've hobnobbed with Barney Barnato, Cecil Rhodes, Alexander the Third, Emperor of Russia, and his son, the present Czar Nicholas; with President Porfirio Diaz and the real head of his Mexican Government, Romero Rubio.

I've lived and worked in every State and Territory of the United States, including Alaska; I've worked and adventured in England, France, Germany, Spain, South Africa, Australia, Russia, Siberia, China, Japan, and Hawaiian Islands. I've spent thirty years associating with real men, and doing the work which has helped the world on.

Naturally much of adventure has come my way, as I am a keen sportsman, and as a youngster never missed any chances for work, gain or adventure.

With all this, I could not sit down and write any interesting story if my life depended upon it; but still, I feel that the "Camp-Fire" should be open to me.

THE following from Radoslav A. Tsanoff concerning the new serial opening in this issue makes good reading, yet will in no way spoil the reader's enjoyment of the plot to be unfolded in this and the two following numbers. Incidentally, it will take the tale out of the class a reader is likely to consider written wholly from the imagination. As Mr. Tsanoff explains, no one woman is the original of Adalena in the story, though several have played similar parts in Balkan history. Some of you will remember, from the August Camp-Fire, Arthur D. Howden Smith's account of his meeting with one such—Tzveta Bojova.

"Pawns of Liberty" has Macedonia-of-yesterday for its setting, but a good deal of its inspiration comes from Bulgaria-of-the-day-before. The Balkan War, and the revolutions of the Bulgars in Macedonia which preceded it, only continued the Bulgarian struggle for liberty which had made the '60s and '70s of the last century years of tragic glory. Some of the youths of the Bulgarian '76 became the leaders of the revolts in Macedonia during the last two decades. For, be it remembered, Macedonia and Thrace are largely inhabited by Bulgars, and the struggle for freedom was therefore a Bulgarian movement.

Not infrequently women took part in the actual fighting. No one individual woman, however, is Adalena's prototype; although in the insurrections of forty years ago a woman, called "The Long-Haired One," did repeatedly risk her life as an apostle of freedom, and, more recently, at Kumanovo in Macedonia, another Bulgarian woman gained undying fame by her patriotism.

A Turkish tax-wagon was actually held up by a band of insurgents some forty years ago in the Araba Konak defile; and the death-danger in which the subsequent complications placed the master-organizer of that revolution, Vassil Levsky, led one of the leaders, Uzunoff, to undertake a journey similar to that which Adalena makes to Uskub. The trial of Boyan the Hermit by Murad Pasha, and the Uncle Tosho episodes, are also based in part on semi-historical data, as can be substantiated by Bulgarian *chetnik* "memoirs." On the eve of an uprising a Bulgarian insurgent, at the end of his resources, crossed the frozen Danube River by means of a board-bridge spanning the narrow current in the middle; only in his case the hut off which he ripped his plank was not abandoned, and he had to knock the Moslem fisherman unconscious, *ad majorem libertatis gloriam.*

THE authors of "Pawns of Liberty," Corrinne and Radoslav Tsanoff, sailed this Summer for Plodiv, or Philippopolis, Bulgaria, where Mr. Tsanoff was to serve on the editorial staff of the *Zornitza*, the famous Bulgarian journal, taking the opportunity to study the present difficulty in the Balkans at first hand. "We may have," writes Mr. Tsanoff, "the chance of living through stories instead of writing them. We expect to return in the Autumn."

I WOULD give almost anything if I could invent a way to make all applicants for identification-cards comply with the very simple and easy conditions. *Why* not give us the name and address of the person to be notified in case of trouble? What earthly use could the card be in an emergency if we have the name of no one to notify? We could, of course, notify the man himself that he was in trouble, or address a few lines of sympathy to his corpse, but he might just as well write to his own corpse in advance.

Oh, yes, I'm sore! I've already pounded away several times on this one point, and still we get dozens of applications that fail to give the name and address of the person to be notified in case of emergency. Every one means the time and trouble of writing to each man and of his writing back to us before we can send him a card. Actually, while I'm in the very act of writing this my secretary brings me a letter from a man who failed to give us this information, to whom we wrote a special letter asking for it, and who now writes in asking for another card for a friend, and who has not yet given us this information for either himself or his friend! Sure I'm sore.

THE worst of it is that, after all, this very kind of happy-go-lucky carelessness is typical of many true adventurers and, well, I have to grin a little in sympathy. Maybe I kind of like it in

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spite of the needless trouble it makes.

But say, just as one fellow to another, help me out a little on this and give the simple and necessary data asked for when you apply. My mail is "something fierce" and every little saving of time helps along. We're giving you the cards, you know, and all we ask in return is the writing of a few words so that we *can* give them to you.

Once more here is the full explanation of the cards:

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

(A reproduction of both sides of the card was printed in our August issue.)

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

THIS letter, received several days ago, makes very clear the value of our identification-cards. As the distance was too great and the case too urgent for a letter, I wired the "next friend" as registered in our files, though it is no part of our agreement that we use the telegraph for notification. There has not as yet been time for an answer to my letters of inquiry, so we can only hope that aid came in time and that everything is going smoothly. Note that the only clue to the injured man's identity was the little card he carried:

Please notify the friends or relatives of the bearer of your identification card No. — that he is in need of aid at once, and if possible should be taken to his home, if he has one, or his nearest relative.

He was struck on the head in some manner, how, it is impossible to determine, as he is completely out of his mind.

Please attend to this at once.

Here is another letter along the same lines from a man who knows from past experience just what one of those little cards can mean in a tight place:

I already know how one could have helped me, and therefore take this opportunity to apply for one. I met with an accident in Porto Rico recently and was unconscious for the better part of a week from a fractured skull, and had I not recovered no one would have known whom to notify. As it was, it was more than a month before my relatives were informed of my condition.

FREDERICK WILLIAM WALLACE has no story in this number, but it's an awfully hot, stuffy day and here comes a letter from him bringing into the office such cool sea-breezes and so strong a tang of the out-of-doors that I am going to pass it on to you at once on the chance that it may reach some of you indoors on a day when it will be equally welcome.

I don't need to remind you of Mr. Wallace's former stories nor of the fact that his fishing trips are not merely those of a writer seeking material, but the pursuance of a lifelong habit of spending all the time possible on the sea as fisherman or sailor.

I'VE only just returned from an eight weeks' trip as a trawl-hauler and halibut-thumper aboard of a halibutter working the grounds off Anticosti Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. I'm just bulging with experiences which I will get into story form for you as soon as I possibly can.

THIS halibut fishing is the best yet. The halibut is no slouchy, logy thing like cod, haddock, etc. The halibut is the King Fish of the deep-sea trawlers. He's a fighter who struggles like the devil the whole length of the trawl and who lays all his 50 to 300 pounds on your arms as you haul him up from a hundred-fathom bottom. When he comes up to the surface, he curls his tail under the dory bottom and refuses to budge. Out comes your club. Sock it to him right between his eyes—him lashin' an' kickin' annoyed-like—and when you've got him calmed down, gaff him, careen the dory till the gunnel is level with the water and heave him in. When you commence hauling the gear again, he sometimes wakes up, and for a minute he raises h—l in the dory with that awful tail banging—oars flying, pen-boards knocked out and gear all snarled. Sock it to him again with the "killer" and lash his tail to the rising-strip.

I can describe it all right, as I did many a spell in the dory and I have experienced the thrill of the primeval man in smacking Mr. Halibut between the

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eyes. It's almost as good as being a policeman in a labor strike. I have my "killer" hung up in my den. I made it myself from a peavey handle which I picked up in Ellis Bay, Island of Anticosti—Mr. Henri Menier's island kingdom in the Gulf. Thus—a double souvenir. We landed an immense trip—in fact the largest ever fetched into a Canadian Atlantic port. The vessel was almost awash with the load—81,000 lbs. fresh halibut; 15,500 fresh cod; 12,000 salt cod—pretty good for a small eight-dory schooner.

AS TO "At Mile Ninety-Two," last month's complete novel, the following from Hulbert Footner, its author:

The scene of "At Mile Ninety-Two" is laid, as everybody who knows the place will recognize, in the Yellowhead Pass during the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. The camp itself will do for any of the camps while at head of construction, and the characters, while I have carefully avoided photographic portraiture, will be recognizable as types. (I hope!) At any rate construction is completed now, and this particular gang is scattered to the four winds.

It may be objected that some of the scenes are too highly colored. I can only reply that I have been obliged to tone things down for the sake of the story. Truth is Stranger than Fiction! Further details of the construction-camps may be found in the actual account of my visit, "New Rivers of the North."

You ask me about my other stories of the Canadian Northwest. My first novel, "Two on the Trail," was published in 1911. Copies may still be had, I understand, from the most enterprising booksellers. My latest offense, "Jack Chanty," is just published, or about to be. This is the story of a fascinating young voyageur who had no peace at all from the girls.

I HAVE a turquoise with a hole bored in it. Probably once worn on a necklace. I know that it—and others—was once hidden in the hollow of the image of Buddha in a deserted monastery in Thibet. I know, too, that Gordon McCreagh bears a scar upon his chin and that he gave me the turquoise. You scent a story, of course. Well, there is one. A true story. But we'll save it till we have the fiction tale Mr. McCreagh has woven from it.

SOMETIMES people write asking me to give them a list of expeditions preparing to set forth, or of other adventures they could find a place in, or of men for some venture of their own. On the whole I'd rather not comply with these requests. It seems fairer to all concerned to let the "Wanted" column speak for itself, giving all of you its information at the same time.

Speaking of the "Wanted" column, we received several letters for No. W 87, but they were returned to us when forwarded to the address he gave us. Since then No. W 87, or No. 87, as I believe it was printed (we now use the W to distinguish from identification-card numbers), has bobbed up some hundreds of miles from his first address and can now be reached.

HERE is a letter from C. H. Claudy, whom you may remember as the author of "The *Ayrshire* and the Iron Car:"

We were two, and camped on the Virginia shore of the Potomac, above the Great Falls and the big dam that gives Washington, D. C., its daily drink. We had come the fifty-some miles from Harper's Ferry in a slender canoe, well loaded, on the crest of the worst flood the city had had for an even twenty years. We went to bed in our shack that night with the water ten feet above normal. It was any amount you like above normal next morning—it lapped the steps of our bank-high shack and we cooked over alcohol because there was no ground left to hold a fire.

Then we crossed this raging torrent in the canoe less than a mile above the dam. The variety of fools we were is not statable in a polite magazine. For though the current ran a mild eight miles on our side, it ran twenty on the Maryland side, as we might have known had we stopped to think.

Well, we got across! We broke no paddles, lost no lives and spilled no dunnage, and you may wonder where the adventure came in. But I look back to the two or three minutes in which we swept down the river toward that terrible grind and roar of the falls as the most exciting I ever knew—*for there was no place to land!* Sixteen feet of water had gone far beyond the shore-line—our "shore" was a forest of tree-trunks, with never a place to beach the canoe.

I own gladly to being plain scared—gladly because I sat still and obeyed orders from the bow. And bow—a corking hand in a canoe—kept her right side up with care and skill, called for his "two starboard" or his "hold hard port" as angry spouter or whirling tree-trunk dictated, and held his nerve and mine until, so close to the sinking swirl of water just over the dam that it rather chills imagination even now to think of it, he spied the hanging grapevine for which he had looked, swung on to it with a grip that bruised his hands—one grand swing in, a bump—and we were as calm as clams. It took us an hour to work the canoe through the trees, and the sound of that roar was with us all the time.

The lock-tender on the canal—for the use of which around the falls we had dared the crossing—looked the word "liar" he dared not utter when we said we had crossed the flood above the dam. I don't blame him much—and after all, the canal and its locks were flooded out of commission, so we had only our excitement for our pains.

And yet—while I wouldn't do it again for a farm, the memory is sweet to the taste. I wonder why danger surmounted is so enjoyable in retrospect?

Perhaps the answer to that question would help answer many more as to the whys of adventure.—ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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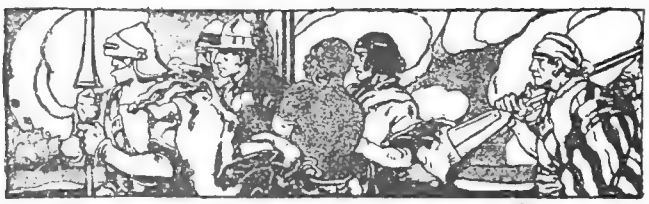

WANTED —MEN *and* ADVENTURES

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the Camp-Fire, free of charge, to such of our readers as may care to avail themselves of it. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or part of a letter. Any inquiry for adventures or adventurers sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor.

AM 24 years old, weight 140; full of activity, strictly temperate. Would like to join an expedition going anywhere. Can handle a rifle.—Address H. BRIEN, 113 Fulton St., Buffalo, N. Y.

WANT about 20 young men, strong and not afraid of hard work or danger. Will furnish two-masted auxiliary schooner and all equipment, except clothes, for our various adventures. It will cost each man $500 to join this outfit. I will furnish food for all for one year, after that, if we care to continue, each man will stand his share (out of the profits). Profits are divided equally, one share to the boat and one to each man. We start as soon as we can get together. No invalids need apply.—Address No. 114.

AM 19 years old. Have been through the mill since 15. American. Ready for anything with a little money or excitement or both.—Address HARRY DOUGLASS, General Delivery, Denver, Colo.

WANT a partner. Already have a good faithful pal in a .45 Colt's automatic, but at times the desire for human companionship becomes too strong. Would prefer a young chap of about my own age (22) and willing to go anytime, anywhere, any way. Also no grouches need apply. Have been on the go for the last six years.—Address No. 115.

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE—Success is sometimes embarrassing. When our "Wanted" department was started I hoped it would be of value to some of you and that it would bring forth enough applications to make its continuance worth while. It did. In fact, it has been bringing more and more each month till now it is bigger than the whole of the "Camp-Fire" used to be. At this rate it will soon be occupying ten or twelve whole pages each month and still growing.

Obviously something has to be done. Just as obviously it isn't fair to cut it down by printing some applications and omitting others. If we condense the notices much more it becomes a mere catalogue, giving no man room to state his case fully enough for the man who reads it to get an intelligent idea of his qualifications. Since it is proving of undoubted value to many of you and since our aim is to make ADVENTURE valuable as well as interesting to its readers, we do not wish to abolish the department entirely.

Fortunately there seems a way to continue it on a basis that will not impair its practical usefulness, yet will prevent its taking up so many pages of the magazine each month. Just the kind of change an efficiency engineer would recommend.

HERE'S the idea. If we print each month only the notices of adventures or expeditions seeking men and omit *all* notices of men seeking adventures, we shall accomplish just as much as heretofore. Indeed, it will on the whole give quicker service. The only change is that the "adventures" will be printed and the "men" will write to them, instead of both being printed and writing back and forth to each other. Also it will take only a small fraction of the space the department now eats up.

So from now on send no notices to our "Wanted" column unless you are looking for men for an expedition or adventure of your own. If you are one of those looking for an adventure, do not send in any notice, since all you have to do is watch the column for opportunities offered.

Notices received up to the time this issue goes on the stands will be published as before, but after that only those asking for men.

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TRAINING — military and technical; professionally a mining and mechanical engineer. Adverse conditions my forte, viz: inadequate equipment, recalcitrant labor, natives or governments. Of necessity at various times "swamp angel," muleskinner (8 line), prospector, automobile constructor, master mechanic, powder foreman, etc., all of these jobs culminating in executive positions covering U. S., Europe, South and Central America, and the West Indies. Among my minor qualifications I may mention horsemanship, boxing, fencing (broadswords), revolver and rifle marksmanship (straight, fancy and ricochet). In my student days, I made the 'varsity football and track teams.

At present in business for myself and doing well, but can't be contented with the humdrum existence. Will undertake anything on land, sea or air that promises remuneration and calls for a combination of brains, brawn and nerve. All communications treated in strictest confidence. Can satisfy interested parties as to my ability and character.—Address No. W 129.

ANY one who can use a young man 21 years old in good health? Have hunted big game in Washington and British Columbia and know how to use a gun. Willing to take anything which promises some excitement and a little money. Have been shot at several times and hunted with a .44 but have had no real adventures. Will go any place, South America preferred. Have tried my hand at many trades and am no shirker.—Address JACK MANSON, 3629 11th Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash.

IS THERE any one fitting out an expedition to any part of the world — trading, prospecting or along these lines—that could use to advantage two Americans of exceptional ability where tact and diplomacy combined with the willingness to work would be an asset? Both large, healthy, able-bodied, and can adapt ourselves to surrounding conditions. Will work with the leader on profit-sharing basis, provided things look good.—Address No. W 149.

AM TWENTY-THREE years old, American and fairly well educated. Have been an aeronaut, acrobat with circus, aviator and near-adventurer. Have traveled in the States, Canada, Mexico, Cuba and a little in Porto Rico. I can *hablar Español* a little bit, nothing to brag of, though. Am quick to pick up if I get the chance, and could master Spanish very shortly. Have been in many tight places and never showed the white feather yet.

Would like to get a place with some shipping or trading agency that wants a man for some of their foreign houses, in any capacity that I could fit in, or on some plantation, coffee, sugar, etc.

My reason for wishing to settle down to something steady is I am married now; and though my wife is equally as adventure-loving and fearless as I am we want something to *tie to*. We wish to settle in some Spanish-speaking country. Can you find some one who needs me?—Address No. W 128.

CAN use a few young men who are absolutely fearless and have a strong desire for adventure with some taste and ability for detective work. Must have speaking knowledge of one of the following languages, French, German, Italian, Spanish or Russian. Americans preferred. One man wanted for work in South America lasting three months. All expenses and nominal salary.—Address No. W 125.

I LEFT England in '98 for Cape Town, joined the B. S. A. Police there, was sent to Buluwayo—from there trekked to Salisbury, then Umteli —Inyange and up to one of branches of the Zambezi. Returned to England and joined the I. Y.'s ("Innocent Yokels") for the Boer War. Saw a lot of the country including the Colony Free State and Transvaal without hearing a shot fired. Since then have been in this country with one trip to Europe, including Monte Carlo. Saw-mills, pulp-mills, lumber-camps have been my lot since. If anybody has anything better to offer should like to hear. Forty-one years old, well educated.—CHAS. WINDSOR, Groveton, N. H.

AM AN Elk in good standing, age 22, an extra good rifle, revolver and shotgun shot, can make 6 out of 10 bull's-eyes with Springfield at 1,000 yards or less, drive tack at 50 yards with automatic pistol 7 out of 10 shots, and get average of 850 to 900 out of possible 1,000 with shotgun at all shoots.

Have been over all of N. & S. America, taken part in Kentucky mountain feuds and when still a youngster of 10 or 12 was mixed up in the killing of the Governor of Kentucky (Goebel) so much that at the present time I have the gun in my possession with which Wm. Goebel was assassinated.

Speak and read German; understand Spanish and French. First-class draftsman and civil engineer; also know considerable of electrical engineering; can run stationary or movable engines, either electric, gas or steam. First-class mathematician and able to sail or pilot a vessel in any waters where I have a map to go by. Have also done considerable newspaper work, reporting, etc.

Do not fear anything as I believe that when the time comes for us to die, we will, no matter where we are or what we are engaged in.

Willing to undertake any mission to any country on the face of the world that would pay my expenses and a little per diem and promise me adventures of the most dangerous sort, with the understanding that on my arrival in the U. S. (on return if I did arrive) that my transportation would be paid and all of my expenses back to Frankfort, Ky. I am ready to go anywhere on 24 hours' notice. Am 6 ft. 1 in. tall, weigh 170 lbs., am expert wrestler, boxer and endurance runner.—Address No. W 124.

HERE is a bit out of a letter from a man interested in the manufacture of firearms with an electric-light attachment:

IF ANY of the Camp-Fire boys hit this neck of the woods, have them call me up by telephone. Or they can write me. Any you would send to me I will expect to be right as a golden guinea. I would take pleasure in showing them something for a tight place—South America, Orient or any old place. I had everything ready to go to C. Juarez and manufacture, but Hades was popping there and here also at same time.—Address CLIFFORD A. LEWIS, 381 East 12th Street, Portland, Oreg.

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HAVE been a soldier, sailor, private detective, border guard, chauffeur fireman in New York City, and am at present on the police force of the same burgh, but am getting round-shouldered and want to be up and doing. So if you know any one who wants a young fellow, strong, healthy, an expert with rifle and revolver, who understands machine-guns from the ground up and who can throw the diamond hitch, just let me know and I'll come a-flying.—Address No. W 123.

AGE 27, weight 215, active and in perfect health. Marksman, fair cook, a bit of a sailor and something of a mechanic. Have been to Alaska and now I would travel in the other direction. South America looks good to me, either hunting, digging or sailing. Could hold my own with the best, and if there be a chance of financial returns, so much the better. I have no cash to put up, but if anybody knows of an outfit where I could fit in, just tip me off.—Address BERT MCCRACKEN, 759 Monroe St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

IS THERE a young literary chap whose courage and love of adventure are longer than his purse, who would form pards with an artist of 21? Am now traveling in Maine, but can make New York for a start to any place or places that will give material for work. My idea is to turn experience into money. If you're a live man and game for anything, speak up.—Address E. S. WINSHIP, 83 Mellen St., Portland, Me.

AM A GRADUATE physician and wish employment at a salary on some expedition, or in Central or South America for some outfit. Have had some experience in Mexico with tropical diseases.—Address No. W 138.

AM LOOKING for adventure in any part of globe. 5 feet 7 inches tall, weigh 148 lbs., age 23. Best of health. Have college education. Can speak French and some Spanish. Canadian. Good rifle shot; pretty fair athlete. Can do anything. Am ready for anything inside the law.—Address No. W 139.

AM GERMAN-AMERICAN, 25 years old, 5 feet 6½ inches tall, weight 118 lbs.—small but can do as good a day's work as anybody, and what's more am willing to work. Speak English, German, some French and some Spanish. Have worked on cattle ranches from Montana to Arizona. Been cooking for U. S. surveying crew in several Western States and have lived outdoors pretty near all my life. Don't claim to be an expert in anything, but can do a lot of things as good as anybody and never am too old or too wise to be told or to learn something. Always cheery and no matter how bad things are or go, you'll never hear me squeal, but smiling I try to do the best. If anybody wants a partner I would like to go either to Central America or to the South Sea Islands. If anybody would give me information, or give me the address of a person where I could get such, about South America and the cattle business down there, I would be ever so much obliged.—Address No. W 140.

AGE 21, weight 140, height 6 ft. Crack shot with rifle, fair with revolver. Good horseman. Printer by trade, at present monotype machinist. Traveled considerable in U. S. on motorcycle. At home with all types of engines, motors, etc. Have considerable hunting and camping experience. Good cook; know something about nursing. Expert photographer, can swim, row, paddle, box and play the piano and do several other things. Will go anywhere.—Address JOHN L. WHITE, care of Review and Herald, Takoma Park, D. C.

YOUNG American, 21 years old, graduate of military school, three years in National Guards, and have two expert rifleman's medals; 6 ft. 1 in. tall; would like to join some expedition going to foreign countries. Am a son of one of Kentucky's best known and respected families. Would prefer going to Africa or South America. Never drank any kind of liquor in my life.—Address No. W 141.

AM TWENTY-THREE years old. Have trapped in New York State three Winters; hunted and trapped in Florida two Winters. Claim to be a good woodsman and camp cook and guide. Live a good part of the year in the wilds. I can hold my own with any kind of firearm. Can furnish good references as to character, etc. Ready to go on any hunting, camping or adventure trip providing it's within the law and in the U. S. Also there must be a little money in it.—Address No. W 142.

YOUNG man, strong, healthy, can operate a wireless, would like to ship on some private boat anywhere and any time.—Address JOHN VAN DYKE, 155 West 80th St., New York City.

AM TWENTY years young, 5 feet 6 inches tall. Was born in Switzerland but my father was a rover before me, so I saw France, Switzerland and Germany while I was still very young. Have been engineer of a small light plant; fireman, printer, shipping-clerk, worked on a ranch as line-rider; also a pretty fair machinist. A sticker if I get where there is enough excitement to keep me going. If anybody could use me I would be very glad to hear from them.—Address No. W 143.

YOUNG man going to South America first part of 1914, but would go sooner if can strike an expedition to some part of that country. Age 29, good health, hard worker; going to try my chances in new country.—Address E. M. BEASLEY, Gaulck, Dade Co., Fla.

WOULD like employment with some man or company of men that might need a traveling manager or any kind of help where a fellow might travel over United States or Canada and see the country while earning his money. Anything in this line for adventure. Age 25. Have high school education, and wish for better but have to seek much of it through adventure as so much home studying and reading has affected my eyes. Am of one of the best families of the South and can furnish A 1 references as to character and business. Would prefer position with people of refinement and fine character. Not afraid of work.—Address No. W 144.

AM AN Englishman, public school education and Royal Military College, Sandhurst (same as West Point College), gave up the army—not enough chance of excitement. Have traveled all

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around Africa, farmed in British East Africa, and shot big game up there—incidentally had one or two "close calls" both with the big game and the natives. Can talk three African languages and know the habits of the native; can also talk French (fluently) and a little Italian. Am 22 years old, 5-11 in height, weight about 160 lbs., perfectly healthy, no quitter, a born world-wanderer and adventure-seeker. Can ride, row, paddle, swim, box, etc., a good rifle and gun shot and pistol shot, no nerves and pretty tough.

A good companion, never seasick, sing a bit (the sort of singing that sounds all right round the campfire a few hundred miles from civilization, but I'm no top-notch drawing-room performer). Used to roughing it. Have traveled over most of Southern Europe, and done journalism in Naples, Paris, London and Canada—pretty fair descriptive writer. Can look after myself in most places and conditions, traveled sometimes on the "rods" and sometimes on the "cushions"; been to India, know people all over the world, some well-known world-wanderers among them.

Ready for most anything, tropical climate preferred—not so keen on the icy regions—East Africa preferred to other countries, as it's a grand country for sport and money-making, and is a man's life out there—but don't object to any other little old country. If any one wants to go anywhere and wants a good trustworthy companion—who, by the way is not a bad cook, a letter will find me. Was thinking about a trip out towards India and around there to look for excitement, but it's pretty dull going alone and if any one has any proposition, I'm ready for it. No money to speak of, though I expect to make some soon.—Address GUY N. B. DENT, care of Empire Hotel, Regina, Sask., Canada.

SHOULD like to get in touch with some real adventurers in Minneapolis, as I am a short distance from there.—Address D. L. SCANLON, Gen. Del., Stevens Point, Wis.

SHOULD like to get the names or in touch with some mining or trading companies doing business in South America or the Gold Coast of Africa.—Address LEON RICHARDS, Gary, W. Va.

AM AN Englishman by birth, out of old London. Left England 1906, at the age of 16 years, been from coast to coast in Canada and traveled extensively in Alberta and Southern B. C., and been on Vancouver Island; traveled some in Sask., Washington, U. S. A., Oregon, Idaho, and Montana and am thinking of going to California next Winter. 23 years old, 5 ft. 7, 155 lbs., and pretty tough. Been farmer, laborer, skinner, lumber-jack, miner and have got the Wanderlust bad. Would like to hook up with some expedition, land or water, anywhere in the West. Money no object, but take a share of anything that could be got. Tackle anything. Familiar with guns but not much of a shot. What's doing?—Address JOHN E. BEADLE, Melville, Sask., Canada.

WANT to go on trip with party where there will be some excitement. Don't care where. Can furnish own rifle and outfit but no cash. Remuneration must be sufficient to cover traveling expenses. Telegraph and wireless operator. Have fired locomotives and steam shovel, been night watchman and also have tramped it over most of the U. S., except the extreme South and East. Put in some time in Canadian Army, infantry regiment. Handy on snow-shoes and with small boats. Have been to Panama, Mexico and Alaska. Would prefer exploring expedition especially to Peru or else the interior of India. Will take most anything, and have best of references as to character, ability, etc.—Address HARVEY H. LONG, care of Marconi Wireless Tel. Co. of Amer., San Francisco, Cal.

AM DESIROUS of getting in touch with some young man as a partner on a trip to South America this Fall. Am a jack of all trades myself and have traveled considerable in the States, also a couple of times across the pond to England. Most principally I work at engineering and machinist's trade. High school education, 21 years old, and have been a floater nearly all my life. I believe there is any amount of adventure and money to be had in the outlying districts in S. A. for those who want to seek them and who have good intelligence and all around experience. My idea is to ship from New York in the Fall and get off at some good port in Brazil or Argentina and then strike out and make good to the best of my ability. I should like to have a young man with similar ideas and of fair education and mechanically inclined as a partner.—Address No. W 122.

HAVE two honorable discharges from U. S Army. One term of two years in Infantry in Philippines and one term of three years in a light Battery in Philippines. 29 years of age, weigh 198 lbs., and can rough it no matter how hard the going may be. Willing to go to any part of the world. Have roughed it in thirty-eight States and five foreign countries. Want to make one more trip, make a good stake and settle down. I enlisted in the Army at the age of 15 years. Want to join some parties who can use me. Any old thing that will get me a good stake. At present holding job as special policeman, but find it too tame and not enough money in it for me. I can leave here on very short notice. My only regret is that I have no money to invest, but I will give good service.—Address J. TOMSEN, 2906 Arsenal St., St. Louis, Mo.

TWENTY-THREE years old. Fair shot with rifle. Have worked in lumber and construction camps along the Pacific Coast; also cattle ranches in Glen and Humboldt counties, California, but without any real adventure. Anything with excitement and a chance to make a stake will suit me, in the Southwest preferred.—Address No. W 118.

BORN in America and have never seen the outside of it, which is my desire. Experienced chauffeur and know an auto from A to Z. Very anxious to get in some tight places. Sick of asphalt streets and the sound of autos. Age 18. Can you use me?—Address No. W 130.

AGE 29, served three years U. S. Navy, worked eight years on railroad location and construction in U. S. 5 feet 11 inches tall, weight 165 lbs. Can ride, shoot straight, and am good instrumentman and draftsman. In case you have some one needing a man as described above, who wants to get to the woods—I am it. Would prefer South America,

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South Africa or Morocco. No objection to Mexico or Rocky Mountains, except that I have been in both.—Address No. W 121.

LOOKING for adventure. Don't care where or what, just so there is plenty of adventure and a little gain. 6 feet tall, weight 178 lbs., 27 years of age. Was in 'Frisco during earthquake; in Montana when the 1907 panic struck. Traveled 1,800 miles with but a two-cent stamp when I started. Have just got back from the Southwest and some parts of Mexico where I went in April, 1911. Had a few minor things happen to me during Madero revolt and my last adventure was when I got marooned on a telephone-pole for thirty-six hours watching everything in the line of houses, horses, dogs, sheds, etc., going by at a twenty-mile-an-hour gait in the recent Columbus, Ohio, flood. If it's anything in the line of hard work, long hikes or a good rifle and pistol man and a little soldier work, I am your man, and if there is any one who can use me any place let me know, for I am open to anything. Will go anywhere from North to South Pole just to be on the go in search of adventure.—Address J. Z. HECK, 718 W. Chapel Street, Columbus, Ohio.

WOULD like to correspond with a fellow who knows the Fraser River in B. C. More especially the upper river, above Kanaka.—Address No. W 120.

HAVE an open date for anything out of the ordinary, but any project with the $-mark preferred. 40 years of age and have seen life as it really is, for the past twenty years. Have been through and seen service in the Philippines; visited Japan and Mexico, have a good education in English and am fairly proficient in Spanish. Expert penman, crack rifle-shot and can cook or rough it with any man. No strings tied to me and will welcome all bona-fide letters.—Address No. W 119.

WANTED — Information about or opportunity for out-of-door life, preferably with travel, that will afford a fair living.—Address DAN WESTON, 141 West 116th Street, New York City.

AM OPEN for any kind of a trip that promises excitement. A little profit would be acceptable. Would prefer a trip to South America. Have had in mind an expedition up the Orinoco in search of the waterway said to connect the Orinoco and the Amazon. Would be glad to hear from any one making up a party to explore little-known parts of the world. Would like to join party for prospecting. Have never had any adventures but am still hoping.—Address No. W 131.

HAVE been in this place almost eight months, which is something unusual for me, and am beginning to feel restless again. Employed at present as engineer, fireman, lineman, electrician, collector, in a word, chief cook and bottle-holder in an electric light plant in a small town, and I can promise you it keeps one on the jump. Would like to get in with a party going on an expedition that would have use of my services and where there would be chance of adventure and money. I wouldn't be so particular about the last, but I have a small family to support. Age 27, 5 ft. 10, weight 170 lbs., and can handle a trap or a gun with any of them.—Address No. W 132.

IF YOU know of any expedition going out that could furnish an all-around adventurer, 22 past, with excitement, for the love of Mike let me know of it. Have been in a few gun-fights, traveled almost in every State in the United and a little outside. Can handle any kind of a gun and hit what I aim at. 5 ft. 7 in. in height, weigh 140 lbs., am a sticker and my friends say that the devil could not kill me with an ax. I have no coin, but am willing to do or go any place to make some.—Address GEORGE J. PALMER, care of Racquet and Tennis Club, 27 West 43d Street, New York City.

ANY one wanting or knowing of an expedition or enterprise needing healthy, hardy, able young man, write to me, regardless of its nature or whereabouts. Am a genuine sticker. 23 years old, lived a varied life, in best of health. 5 ft. 8½ in. tall, weight 170 lbs.—Address HARRY E. ROSE, Sink, Oregon.

WILL invest a thousand dollars or more in some legitimate enterprise which will furnish me with a fair return on my investment and also a little adventure. Have traveled in Brazil, Panama, Colombia, Peru and the Guianas, during the years of 1900 to 1906. Am a fair photographer and have a very complete, high-grade, Graflex equipment. Am 30 years of age, 5 ft. 10 in. in height, weigh 180 stripped.—Address No. W 133.

AM A young man, 21 years old, 5 ft. 9¼ in. tall, weight 152 lbs. Good habits, no booze-fighter, fine condition, crack shot with 30-30 or any rifle or carbine, revolver or shotgun. I want to go to any place in the South Seas, Central America, South America or any place where there is plenty of work, fighting and adventure. Have been in seven States and seen some life. Cow-punching, railroading, machinist's helper, good chauffeur, have worked in logging camps, saw-mills and done everything in general. No bum, but a good all-around worker. Can furnish best of references.—Address No. W 134.

HAVE attempted to get into communication with Jack Tate, whose letter appeared in the August ADVENTURE, but found he had written the letter several months ago and had left town for an indefinite period. Would like to enter into a venture similar to Jack Tate's. Am 22 years of age, 5 feet 8½ inches in height. A fair shot and am at present employed as a railroad brakeman. Passed my physical examination for that position in February of this year.—Address No. W 136.

YOUNG man 30 years old. Traveled all over Europe, South Africa, U. S. A. and Canada. If you've got an expedition going any place and want a good man, I'm the fellow you want. Good rifleman, woodsman, interpreter (French and German); have done placer mining, etc. If you can use me, write quickly.—Address No. W 137.

I AM 21 years old, 6 feet tall, and wefgh 190. Have run a transit in Colorado, been foreman on a construction gang on an irrigation project in the same State, a farmer, fired on a mountain railroad, and for the past year a salesman. Good rifle

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shot and have camped and hunted over half of Colorado. Good education and am of Scotch-Irish descent. Looking for something needing a little red blood. Don't care particularly where I go.—Address, No. 83.

WISH to join an expedition in search of lost treasure or for prospecting, a revolution—preferably in the Latin American countries, or the French Foreign Legion. Am 21, height 6 feet, weight 164 pounds, good physical condition except that I lost my hearing about five years ago. Can read the lips to a slight extent. Can't put any money into an expedition and yet want to get into something that has a chance of my making some money. Am ready to take my chances on anything that fulfils these requirements. —Address, No. 86.

LOST TRAILS

(*Continued from page* 2)

CAN anybody give me information that will lead to the whereabouts of J. W. McKenzie who is a hospital apprentice in the U. S. Navy at the present time? The reason I ask this favor is because he is a brave young man and because he saved the lives of my wife and daughter in Peking, China, during the rebellion last year, at the risk of his own. The last I saw of him was when he left Peking for the Philippines. I will send the informant a check and also my thanks if he will be kind enough to send me that young man's address, and his description. If McKenzie reads this himself he will save you this trouble and also be compensated for his brave act—which it was to me if not to him.—Address, C. J. CALHOUN, 1312 Fourteenth Street, San Francisco, Calif.

NOT being sure of the spelling of one name asked for in the following, we have queried it, so that the man in question will not be thrown off the scent by a wrong name:

Would like to hear from Frank Miller, John Cramford and Lee Cramford, who lived in Ennis, Texas, in Spring and Summer of 1892. I would like to hear from Private William Harson [?], 2nd Bat. 1st Scots Guards. The last time I heard from him he was at Picquet Barracks, London S. W.—Address HARVEY MORRIS, Co. D, 22nd Inf., Texas City, Tex.

WOULD be glad to hear from any of my old shipmates on the *Boston* at Manila, May 1, '98.—Address No. L. T. 96.

WOULD like to learn whereabouts of an Irishman called Eugene Geary, last heard of in Baltimore, Md. Now writing alleged poetry and things for newspapers.—Address D. DORSEY GUY, 23 E. Montgomery Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa.

WOULD like to locate the old comrades that sailed with me on the *Evening Star*, namely, Percy M. DuBois, R. R. Plum, Joe Enscoe, Chas. Carruthers, Lester Selig, Thos. L Hogan and Andy Osbourne.—Address CAPT. A. E. SELIG, 36 Monte Vista Ave., Oakland, Calif.

I WOULD like to know the whereabouts of Captain Vaughn of the Canadian Scouts. He was a lieutenant in Remington's Guides and a braver man never lived. He left the Tigers and went over to join Col. F. Ross, another of our braves. I last saw him while I was on the S. S. Dept., Capetown. I would be more than pleased to hear from any of the boys who were in Remington's Guides or in Roberts' Horse or the Colonial Light Horse. They all knew me as the little Canadian, for I was only a boy of seventeen when I ran away to South Africa. Address PERCY TRESSIDDER, 2705a N. Spring Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

CAN any "Camp-Fire" members who have been in Mexico and thereabouts recently and within the last four years furnish any clues as to the present whereabouts (if living) of Captain F. T. Parker, soldier, sailor, yachtsman, dilettante and adventurer. Left Vancouver, B. C., about four years ago in company with a Captain Crichton, late of His Majesty's Army, for Mexico and believed to have received a commission in the Federal army. Any information regarding him, alive or dead, will be greatly appreciated by his erstwhile friend and companion, J. H. C. MURRAY, Staff Sergt. R. Can. Engineers, Signal Hill, Esquimalt, B. C., Canada.

ADDRESS wanted by shipmate of Frank (?) Montieth, who was mate of the four-masted bark *William P. Frye* when she sailed on her maiden voyage, December, 1902, New York to Shanghai. —Address W. H. DAVIS, Chico, New Mexico.

WOULD Thomas J. Kelly, last heard of in Co. F, 9th Infantry, in 1905, and also ex-prize-fighter, please write to Joseph R. Brandamour. Very important.—Address at Cornelia Street, Plattsburg, N. Y.

IF IN your "Lost Trails" you can get in touch with some of my old comrades I would much like to hear from T. S. M. Cottrell, Corp. McEwen, Trooper Cooper, Sergt. Dacombe of B Troop, M. M. P. Rhodesian Campaign of 1896-97. Also of Capt. Nesbitt, V. C., who took over command of B Troop, and any others who were with us at Hartley Hill, Fort Martin, Fort Retreat and around Mashiangombi's Kraal in '96-'97.—Address M. M. MARSDEN, Ex. Corp. M. M. P., 875 14th Avenue, West, Vancouver, B. C., Can.

HOWARD IRWIN, who sailed from Frisco on the *Maitai*, May 31, 1911, please write CHAS. G. HARVEY, Shoshoni, Wyoming.

WOULD like to find one Gulliver, who was building a railway in Iquique, Chile, in the year 1898. —Address S. B. H. HURST, care ADVENTURE.

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NEWS wanted of "Frisco Pete," who with writer left San Francisco for Indianapolis in September, 1912, stopping off at Sparks, Nev. Last heard of in Ontario.—Address No. L. T. 69.

WISH to hear from Jesse E. Sherick, known as "Pat," who served in U. S. Army in Alaska, Cuba and the Philippines, and the last I heard of him was in Company I, 14th Infantry, Cebu, Cebu, Philippine Islands. This was in 1909.—Address PAUL CONNER, Howard, Kans.

JACK BONHAM, born at Hastings, England; enlisted about 1900 (aged fifteen) and served six years in band of the Royal Sussex; to Sherbrooke, P. Q., Canada, with two other young men, sailing from London, March, 1906; last heard from Aug., 1906, with photo in uniform of Sherbrooke Volunteers; natural musician; favorite with his comrades. Any one having word of him please communicate at once with Mrs. Jean Bonham, care ADVENTURE.

I WOULD like to hear from Frank Miller, John and Lee Crawford, who lived in Ennis, Texas, in 1892. Harvey Morris, Co. D, 22d Inft., Texas City, Tex.

WILL Fred Scott, a newspaper-man in the Fall of 1911 in Pennsylvania, last heard of in New Orleans, communicate with R. W. Coates, care of ADVENTURE.

WM. F. MOLLENHAUER, JR., would like to communicate with Gordon Law.

Would also like to get in touch with Simon P. Culp. Address Wm. F. Mollenhauer, Jr., General Delivery, Owatonna, Minn.

WILL Charles Goolrick, who was discharged from the U. S. N. Hospital Corps at Norfolk in the Winter of 1902-3, advise an old shipmate of his address? Address Box 511, Johnstown, Pa.

SO THAT some of my old comrades may know of my whereabouts, I ask to be admitted to your Camp-Fire; for to-day I find myself half-blind, compelled to bid adieu to the roving life and only in memory live again through the wild scenes of my past life. There are no doubt some of my old shipmates and companions-in-arms who might drop me a line, should they hear of me through the Camp-Fire. F. E. Van Leue, Hornell, N. Y.

I'D LIKE to hear from, or to know what has become of, these men who were in "E" and "C" Troops, B. S. A. P., stationed in and around Salisbury, at Hartley Hills, and New Fort Martin, Rhodesia, South Africa, in 1896-1897: A. S. O'Connor, Bob Ross, Jimmie Van Damme, Hans Kufeke, Jack Griffiths, Julian Harries, Jack Gardiner. Address W. E. Prickett, care ADVENTURE.

WILL Edward J. Raeder, last heard of in Manila, P. I., communicate with Donald F. McGrew, care ADVENTURE.

WOULD like to hear from Martin Lane, Klondike, and late U. S. Army. Last seen in Mexico City.—Address S. H. RIESENBERG, care ADVENTURE.

DICK MARTEL, who was in Hermosilla in 1887, write Wm. E. Saunders, Torresdale, Phila., Pa.

CHARLIE SCHAEFFER, who was in Sonora in 1887, write Wm. E. Saunders, Torresdale, Phila., Pa.

WISH to get into communication with Charlie Sutherland, late of Bechuanaland Police, Jameson Raid, Boer War, in charge Union Castle Line Dock at Cape Town. Address Talbot Mundy, care ADVENTURE.

WILL Jack Prout, who was in Porcupine Camp in 1908, communicate with R. W. Coates, care of ADVENTURE.

WORD wanted of George Dean, of Massachusetts, who sailed on the whaling-bark *Canton* in Hudson's Bay in 1893. Address Stephen A. Reynolds, care ADVENTURE.

WOULD like to find my brother, Oscar Smith. Haven't heard from him in years. Last heard of in Kimberly, South Africa. He is an Australian from Melbourne. He is, or was, an actor, a ventriloquist. Any information will be gratefully and thankfully accepted.—Address MRS. MYEE DAVIS BOYLE, 3039 Morgan Street, St. Louis, Mo.

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WILL Patrick Cunningham, last heard from in Ft. Worth, Texas, about 1870, or either of his brothers—Michael, was last heard from in Lower California about 1877, and James, who was last heard from in New Orleans in the Winter of 1882, natives of County Galway, Ireland, or anybody who has seen or heard of them, please communicate with their brother, B. CUNNINGHAM, 4004 West Lake St., Chicago, Ill.

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